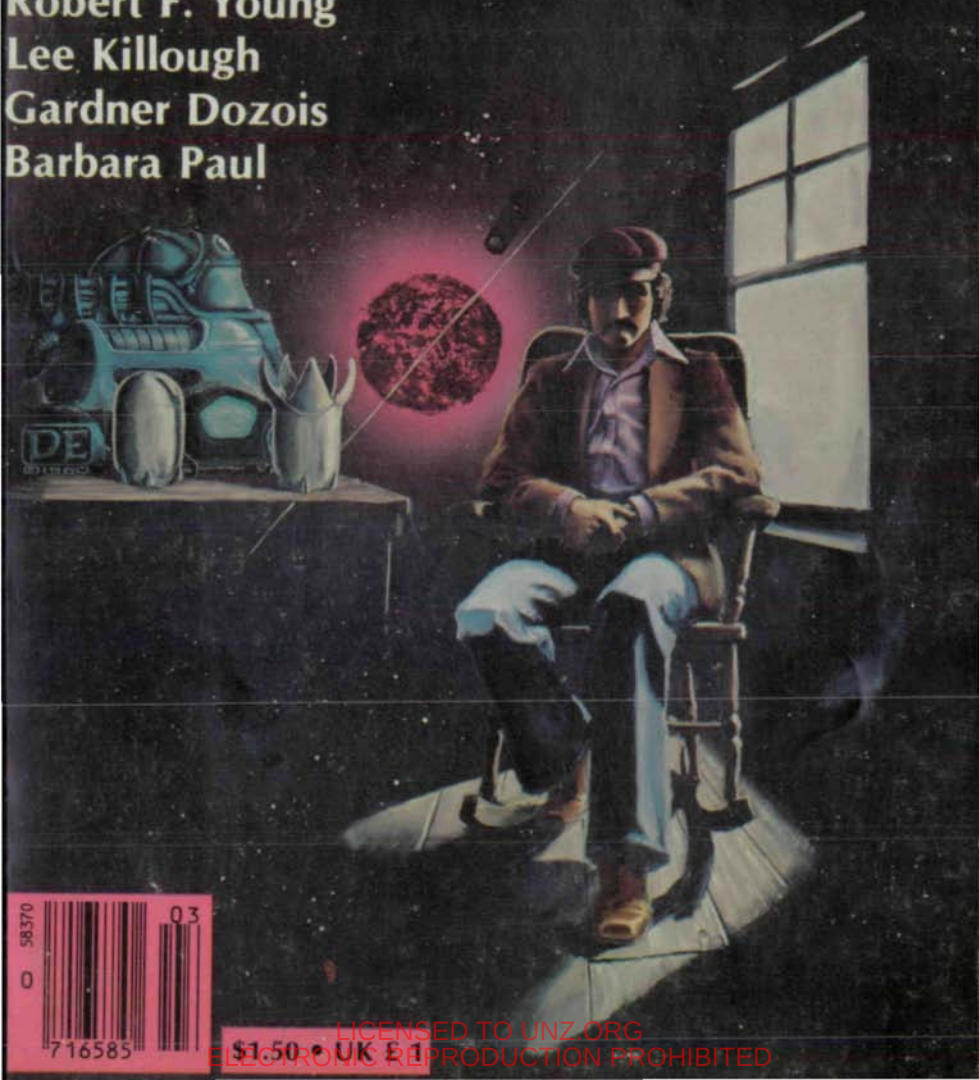
Isaac Asimov WHATZISNAME'S ORBIT

The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction

MARCH

Richard Lupoff
Robert F. Young
Lee Killough
Gardner Dozois
Barbara Paul



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Fantasy & Science Fiction

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MARCH • 33rd Year of Publication

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COVER BY DUNCAN EAGLESON FOR:
"DOCUMENTS IN THE CASE OF ELIZABETH AKELEY"

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Mike Conner ("The Night Stair," January 1982) returns with a remarkably different story about a newcomer to a southern Missouri mining town and her exposure to the glitter of its social life and the darkness of its caverns.

Stillborn

BY

MIKE CONNER

I'm afraid that dress won't do, my dear," said Mrs. Phillip Ash. "Have you an extra shawl in your carriage?"

Claudia Fenster groaned inwardly at the sharp-faced older woman's critical appraisal. It was a typically hot and oppressive August day in southern Missouri, and she had worn a dress of light poplin, never dreaming it might not be appropriate.

"No," she said. "I came in the trolley." Why hadn't her husband, who had inspected Claudia the way a captain inspected his troops before he allowed her to leave the house, warned her that the dress wasn't right? It wasn't dark and heavy as the stuff Mrs. Ash and the other three ladies of the Wednesday Afternoon Club wore. Claudia felt the color rising to her cheeks, but another of the ladies, Mrs. Elly Corporan, smiled sympathetically.

"Don't worry, my dear, I have one for you. Olivia is concerned about your catching a chill when we go down to the caverns."

"Caverns?"

"The Crystal Caverns," Mrs. Phillip Ash snapped. "We generally have our cards there all summer, unless it is raining and not too hot here. You don't fear close quarters, do you, Mrs. Fenster?"

Claudia relaxed some. "I have entered my husband's tunnels on occasion without ill effect."

"Good. Because you would be surprised at how many women whose husbands derive their wealth from the earth swoon at the notion of being swallowed up anywhere near a hole in the ground. Ah! There's Jimbo with the carriage. Ladies."

Mrs. Ash took the front seat with the wife of the Baptist minister, Mrs.

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Burgess, while Claudia sat behind, between Mrs. Corporan and Mrs. Titus Blakely, for the short trip along East Street to the mouth of the Crystal Caverns. Jimbo drove them slowly, so that the common citizens could see the ladies who held the prosperity of Corinth in their grasp. The husbands of Mmes. Ash and Corporan and Blakely had many years ago formed the companies which mined zinc and sulfur and galenite and white lead from the limestone strata beneath the town. In the first days they had employed oxen; now they used steam and even electricity to sustain this town. Thirty years before, Corinth had been little more than a wagon stop on a two-rut road west toward the Oklahoma Indian country.

The sun beat through the haze fearsomely, however, and even Mrs. Ash quickly grew tired of showing herself to the few people out on the street. Jimbo snapped the reins; a few moments later he pulled them up underneath the merciful shade of some hickory trees.

"You'll want this, I promise you," Mrs. Corporan smiled, pressing a crocheted wrap into Claudia's hand as they came from the carriage. While the ladies waited to one side, Jimbo opened a circuit box on a pole and threw a switch.

"Electric lights," Mrs. Blakely said proudly. Her husband had formed the Southern Missouri Mazda Lamp Company six years before. Except for St. Louis and Springfield, Corinth lead the whole of the state in numbers of electric lights and machines. All the streetcar lines were being converted from horse to electric power too.

"The path is smooth, my dear, but keep one hand on the wall of the cave. We don't descend very far — else Reverend Burgess would not allow his wife to join us!" The other ladies laughed as though Mrs. Ash had said the funniest thing in the world. Then they all proceeded on the path through the opening in the limestone bank.

At first, the way seemed to lead to absolute darkness, in spite of the bright bulbs strung above the way. But then Claudia's eyes began to adjust and she could detect a faint sparkling on the opposite wall of the cave, and the dagger tips of long stalactites which hung from the roof. They had not gone very far before it became hard for Claudia to believe there was a hot Missouri town above them. This was a silent world, cool and peaceful, with a breeze of its own running through the passages like the sigh of the earth herself.

Finally they reached a place with more lights, where a table for cards had been erected and there was even a sideboard with glasses and silver for the sweets and lemonade Jimbo had brought down in a hamper. Claudia looked at it all with wonder.

"Don't you fear thieves, Mrs. Ash?"

"The sort of people who resort to thievery usually are afraid of spooks

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and such and won't come into a place like this even with the lights on. I had to beat Jimbo to get him to come the first time. Didn't I, Jimbo?"

"Yes'um."

"You come back the usual time. And mind you don't go wearing down the horses!"

Mrs. Ash sat down. The other ladies took it as their signal to do likewise. Claudia could not help looking around at the wonderful formations of rock which lay half-hidden in the stark shadows thrown off by the mazda lamps. What a wonderful place this was! She could easily imagine rubies or whole diamonds the size of her fist that could be scooped from the walls with a spoon. Who had first found this place, she wondered. Some lone traveling Indian, perhaps, seeking shelter from a storm?

"...I asked, dear, what sort of game you prefer?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Ash." Claudia felt the others were not at all interested in where they were, and thus it would be impolite to remark on the natural wonder of this parlor in the earth. "I do like hearts."

"Unfortunately, we are five. Do you know canasta?"

"A little."

"Then that is what we shall deal." As she ruffled the cards, Claudia noticed that Mrs. Ash's voice — and those of the other ladies as well — seemed louder here, ringing harshly from the walls of the cave. And in the electric light, their complexions and features seemed like line drawings — though Claudia was certain hers must look equally pallorous as well! Mrs. Ash finished dealing the hand, and the game began.

"You are from Michigan, I believe?" Mrs. Burgess asked.

"Until I was married, I lived in Saginaw. Then Mr. Fenster and I took a residence near his business in Uniontown, Pennsylvania." She smiled. "Until he made his decision to purchase the tripoli enterprise here."

"Your husband makes water filters." Mrs. Ash said. It was not a question.

"And grinds tripoli in to all manner of rouge and rottenstone for use in the glass and metal polishing trade. It really is an amazing material.

"In the olden days we called it chat. There's piles of it alongside any road you take leaving town."

"Your husband is to be commended for finding a use for it," Mrs. Corporan said kindly. Claudia, meanwhile, had trouble following which cards had been played and could do nothing to organize her hand, and soon the round was won by Mrs. Burgess. She took the deal and play resumed.

"Dear Mrs. Fenster, I should warn you that we try to leave convention a little behind when we come to play here. So I hope you won't be shocked if I should try to satisfy my curiosity. It's one I have cultivated ever since Phillip made your husband's acquaint-

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ance last fall. How is it he has married a girl so young as you?"

In spite of the warning, Claudia was a little shocked. Perhaps it was the strange way voices sounded in these caverns, but in Mrs. Ash's voice there seemed a distinct accusatory tone.

"Perhaps she craves tripoli," Mrs. Blakely said, and the others laughed. Claudia waited for it to subside.

"My husband was a widower, of long acquaintance with my father. They were comrades in a Pennsylvania regiment during the Great War. Both my father and my husband learned the transport trade during their service."

"Abolitionists, were they?" Mrs. Ash asked sharply.

Claudia very carefully answered, "They worked as expediters and semaphore operators."

"Then your husband was a clerk! Mercy me, ladies, it is a comfort to know we shall all be safe in our beds. Mrs. Fenster excepted, of course!" She poured herself a tumbler of lemonade and drank. "But you still did not explain how love blossomed between you. Where were all the eager boys of Saginaw?"

Claudia felt her heart pounding. They were all looking at her, waiting for her answer. A cold draft swept through the cavern with a faint whining sound which came through a small opening in a passage that was walled off with boards.

"Mrs. Ash, my marriage was an arrangement between my father and my husband to which I gave my full consent — for both their sakes. Being long without a wife and childless, my husband naturally wished for a wife who could bear him an heir—" She halted, wishing she could take back the words. Was that glee in Mrs. Phillip Ash's face?

"Of course we were aware of your difficulty in the spring. It must be very difficult to lose a child, difficult indeed." The cave wind rose, so that the sound became like a cry. Suddenly, Claudia felt chilled to her very bones. Mrs. Ash put a cold hand upon her wrist.

"Ah, but you have youth on your side. Youth conquers all afflictions. I daresay you'll soon have an entire regiment of powder-grinders running underfoot."

She knows! The thought that Mrs. Ash was being deliberately cruel sickened her, and she suddenly stood. "Ladies, I beg your pardon, but the chill is really too much. Next time, I shall have to dress for this place; thank you for asking me along, Mrs. Ash." Claudia turned away from the surprised women and took the path back up to the surface. The heat met her at the mouth of the cave with the force of a blow, but, somehow, Clausia found it a blessed relief.

And so you ran away, like some silly schoolgirl? It's beyond belief by God!" Ulysses Fenster poured himself a

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bourbon and adjusted his considerable girth in the direction of his wife, who had been weeping in a chair.

"I don't like them! The only woman there with any sympathy at all was Elly Corporan, but all of them are cowed by Mrs. Ash, and I will not be."

Fenster's cheeks grew red, as they invariably did when he became angry. "I have explained to you, Claudia, that our acceptance into the so-called society of this miserable town rests entirely with that woman! I'm not asking you to embrace her, but surely you can be amusing for an hour or two and demonstrate to her that you do have some modicum of breeding and poise!"

"She mocked you, Ulysses! She practically accused you of robbing the cradle, and me of seducing a foolish old man for my own gain. Was I to smile sweetly and say, 'Of course, Mrs. Ash, how amusing you are to outline such a comedy.'? She'd think me weak if I didn't rise to your defense!"

"I do not require defending!" Fenster roared. "I have thus far survived the barbs of my fellow man without your assistance, and I daresay I'll continue. By God, Claudia, if you cannot give me a child, at least help me secure a place in society!"

Claudia looked up defiantly, tears filling her eyes. "I would spare you," she said, "but Mrs. Ash knows I can have no more children and she made light of it to her friends. None of them opposed her! None...." She collapsed into tears. Ulysses Fenster put down his glass and, looking crestfallen, knelt beside the chair.

"Claudia ... child, I am sorry if it's true. Even her husband will agree that his wife is difficult. But don't you see she is trying to test you, to gauge your character?"

"I will not be judged by her!"

"And you shall not be, in the end. But consider how much easier life will be once we are finally accepted here. My business will prosper — and then we shall have a fine house in Carthage with a proper staff and electric lights, perhaps even a motorcar!"

"Can Mrs. Ash bring me a child?" She saw her husband's stricken expression and immediately regretted what she had said. No one had been more considerate and kind to her than Ulysses during her convalescence following her fateful and tragically unsuccessful pregnancy. Claudia touched his face.

"I promise you I shall try again. I am worth a dozen of Mrs. Phillip Ash!"

"That's the girl!" Ulysses checked his watch. "Well, I must be off to the Eagle's Club. Shall I tell Ash his wife may expect you next week?"

"If she wants me, yes!" She kissed him, and he was gone. Claudia could not help wishing that Mrs. Ash would not want her again, ever.

But she did. This time, Claudia dressed in dark blue satin, with bloomers and a camisole underneath

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against the chill of the caverns. She rode the trolley to her destination, with the window thrown wide open, fanning herself and resisting a comic urge to pant like a dog in the back of a wagon. By the time she reached her stop on East Street, she was very grateful for the opportunity to escape the heat, if only for an hour or two. There would be heat of a different sort waiting for her in the person of Mrs. Ash, but the intervening week since she had last played cards had given Claudia time to prepare herself. She had long since accepted the death of her child, though it pained her because of the waste of that or any life. Why then should she be bothered by Mrs. Ash's cruelty in mentioning it, as though the death was Claudia's fault? God had a reason for taking the baby's life, and it was not for Claudia or Mrs. Ash to question His wisdom. Firm in her faith, Claudia entered the Crystal Caverns confidently.

The lights had been turned on, but the caverns were empty. Claudia mopped her forehead with a handkerchief and breathed deeply of the cool, refreshing air. The cave sighed in return.

Suddenly, as she had the week before, Claudia felt a strong draft stir the folds of her skirt, and a sound like a cry that seemed to come from beyond the boarded-up passageway. Claudia listened closely, unsure of what she heard. It could have just been the natural vibration of wind passing through spaces between the boards. Yet, there was something about the pitch that gave the sound an eerie, almost human character. Fascinated, Claudia made her way carefully to the spot, putting her hands on the boards and discovering that several of them were loose. She could feel air blowing through them against her fingertips, but now she was convinced that the sound, whatever it was, originated well beyond the barrier. At the same time, she realized it was not exactly like a whistle of wind, either. There was a hitch in it, as though the cavern must take its next breath.

Like the caverns are crying, she thought, pulling at one of the loose boards. Then, all at once, something was pulling on her, and she let out a scream.

Jimbo, Mrs. Ash's driver, stared at her.

"You got no business with that, Mis' Fenster."

"I'm sorry!" She laughed quickly to mask her shock. "I suppose I'm a bit early and — well, I suppose it's the child in me that insists on exploring places like this." Claudia touched the boards again. "Can you tell me why this barrier's here?"

"The pit's in there."

"The pit?"

"Some of the folks call it Indian Hell. It's a place where there ain't no bottom. You toss a rock off the ledge and you never hear it drop. Too many children lost here. Mis' Ash lost her little girl here, crawled in and fell, folks say."

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"That's awful!"

"It put a change on her. Always does, something like that. When the earth swallows somethin' up, folks gotta suffer. You hear what I'm saying."

"Of course," Claudia said, wanting him to go away. She did not really think he was dangerous, but deep in this cave she felt anything could happen.

"You was right to run outa here last week, mis'."

"I don't believe that's any of your concern!" she snapped, face suddenly hot in spite of the cool draft from the passage. Jimbo hardly blinked; he might have been made of stone himself.

"You'll leave these caves again. Mind you take the right way." He turned away as Claudia was about to ask what he had meant. Just then the other ladies — with the exception of Mrs. Burgess, who had the croup and could not come — came down the path. Claudia took a place next to Elly Corporan and steeled herself against some new assault by Mrs. Ash, but that lady now seemed very cordial and even allowed Claudia to deal a game of hearts. After several hands, Mrs. Ash produced a cut-glass bottle from the hamper Jimbo had brought down and poured glasses for all.

"This is brandy flavored with verbena and lemon — a concoction my husband swears is a poison! But I believe it has a beneficial effect upon the respiration. Ladies!"

Claudia sipped as the others drank. Apparently it was the habit of the Wednesday Afternoon Society to indulge when Mrs. Burgess was not present, and Claudia perceived the impression that the preacher's wife had withdrawn today out of consideration for that custom. Soon laughter echoed through the caverns, and the play grew sloppier. The discussion turned to various ladies of the town and the grand Miners' Ball to be held within the fortnight at the new Connor Hotel. Claudia did her best to maintain her interest in the proceedings, though the wine had made her dizzy. Occasionally, above the sound of laughter and the slap of cards, she heard the crying noise. Each time it sounded more and more lifelike, and she could not help but think of Mrs. Ash's child and her terrible fate. To fall, tumbling, into the blackness without hope....

At last, Mrs. Ash declared the session adjourned for the day. Claudia walked unsteadily back to the surface with a pang of regret, for today she had felt safe and comfortable — and, yes, invulnerable too. Perhaps Mrs. Ash sensed it and was wise enough to renew her challenge at another time and place, for in spite of that lady's seeming friendliness — or perhaps because of it — Claudia in no way felt she had been accepted or approved the way her husband wished.

What do they want from me, she thought, boarding the trolley. Perhaps if she could suddenly become old and

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dried-up and barren as they were. Surely she qualified for the last point; the other two she could do nothing about.

The heat and the sound of trolley car wheels began to make her drowsy. Almost against her will she was pulled into fitful sleep, where she saw the look of terror on Ulysses' face when her labor had begun with a gush of waters during dinner. He thought she had damaged herself somehow and had practically beaten the housemaid to death urging her to go fetch the young physician, Dr. Vincent, and then Claudia's labor had begun in earnest, hours of back spasms that no amount of pillows underneath her could relieve. Claudia had closed her eyes and tried to regulate the pressure by thinking of the baby this effort — for it was more work than pain until the end — would bring her. Ulysses, whey-faced and gasping, had valiantly held her hand until at last the handsome Dr. Vincent had arrived to take control of the delivery, telling her she had not long to go, urging her to conserve her energy, ordering the maid to bring compresses for her head and chipped ice to relieve her burning throat.

And then he said, "We're ready now, Claudia—" She remembered quite clearly, remembered smiling and how her heart soared for the final effort of pushing her child free. She watched his face as he probed with his fingers to guide the infant's head through the birth passage and give its shoulders the half-twist that would free it from Claudia's body. He was intent, concentrating, a look of power and confidence on his features, until, suddenly, his mastery faltered, and Vincent became as frightened as her obese old husband.

Claudia gave a final push and felt the euphoria and relief of birth, saw, for an instant, the baby in Vincent's hands and a glimpse of dark, wet hair. "Oh, let me hold him, let me—" But Vincent gave a tight-lipped shake of his head and covered the child in a blanket after severing the cord, gave the bundle to the maid with a terse instruction that Claudia could not quite hear.

"Why can't I see the baby!" she'd screamed.

"You've got to rest. I'm giving you a powder now, to help you sleep. Afterward, I'll be back to speak with you."

Claudia struggled, kicking and screaming until at last Vincent poured ether into a handerchief and held it over her mouth, a sensation she would never forget, one of drowning, of falling utterly away from her baby, the little hands stretching toward her, trying to hold her but failing with a cry that was like the sound of wind, the last sigh of a summer storm, cold and trembling and moist.

She had never seen her child. Claudia slept for a day and a night, and when she awoke it was to Dr. Vincent again, agonized with the respon-

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sibility of telling her the babe had been stillborn and that she must not risk having children again because of some incompatibility between her blood and that of the child had eventually killed the babe while it was still in the womb. The tiny casket at the funeral was sealed. Claudia had not been allowed to see the body, and yet when she tried to lift the casket top, the whole box had tilted, and it seemed so light, as though it was empty.

What had they done with her baby?

The sound of the Crystal Caverns came to her, and she realized with a shiver that she had heard that same cry the moment the doctor had put ether on her face....

"Ma'am?"

She sat upright, bumping her head against the trolley window. The conductor smiled at her. "End of the line, ma'am."

"End of the line..." She rubbed her eyes with her fingertips. "Oh, dear, I've missed my stop. Where are we?"

"Electric Park, ma'am. Northern terminus. I'll be turning around in eight minutes if you want to ride back."

"No ... no, thank you. I think I'll walk for a while."

"We'll be running until the park closes at 10:30."

Claudia thanked him again and stepped down from the car. Though it was barely past supper time, the park was crowded with children and people looking for a few hours' recreation after a long day in the mines or factories. For, although Electric Park was regularly the subject of fiery sermons from all the church pulpits of Corinth, it was in truth more popular than the churches, with its amusement arcades that featured a ride called the Washtub — "the most terrifying attraction in all Missouri!" — its beautiful Rose Grotto, and, most famous of all, the Electric Tower, a tribute to the zinc and sulfur and lead mining that made the storage of electricity in batteries possible. The Tower was two hundred feet tall and carried over 80,000 mazda lamps which, when kindled at dusk, threw off a beacon of light that could be seen for fifty miles. Even in daylight, the Tower was an impressive structure. This was the first time Claudia had ever seen it, for her husband had declared Electric Park to be patronized by the lowest orders of Corinth and had refused to take her to the park.

At any rate, the crowds made her feel better somehow. The people seemed happy, and there was joyful music from the big steam carrousel and the smell of popcorn and Frankfurter sausages. Claudia watched a young couple pushing their baby carriage, and though it pained her, her heart went out to them.

She saw the entrance to the Rose Grotto and hurried toward it, for the baby had begun to cry and it had reminded her of her awful dream and the

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sounds she had heard in the caverns. *I wish I were stronger*, she thought, a little desperately, shaken that the recovery which seemed certain a month ago seemed to be disintegrating rapidly.

"Mrs. Fenster! Is that you?"

Claudia turned, and to her dismay recognized Dr. Vincent. He smiled affably, looking handsome in an off-white suit and straw boater. She smiled as bravely as she could.

"You're looking very well! Are you here alone?" He gazed over her shoulder, searching for her husband. There had been an ugly scene between them on that awful night, and Vincent did not relish the prospect of seeing Ulysses Fenster once more. However, she put his mind at ease.

"I'm afraid I fell asleep on the trolley and came here by accident."

"Seeing you strikes my conscience hard, Mrs. Fenster. I had intended looking in on you, but your husband ... objected to my seeing you again professionally."

Her face clouded as she was reminded of her vivid dream. She could almost smell the ether. "Perhaps he needed to fix responsibility for what happened, Doctor. So it would make some sense to him."

Vincent nodded. They began to stroll and entered the grotto. The blooms were not as numerous as earlier in the season, but there was color enough, and lovely fragrance.

"And you, Mrs. Fenster. Did you fix blame?"

"I took it myself. It seemed the easiest thing to do."

"Mrs. Fenster, I want you to know that if I had not been removed as your physician, I would have advised you to try to have another baby. I believe chances for a successful pregnancy would be good."

"Do you rely on intuition?"

"Statistics, ma'am. Diseases of the blood sometimes show a mathematical pattern in families. We don't know why, but you and your husband may have simply been unlucky."

"Yes. But please, don't speak of it. Really, I have quite forgotten about my affliction."

"Of course. Forgive me."

She turned to him suddenly. "Doctor Vincent, was the baby well-formed? I know it had dark hair, but were the eyes like mine? Did Monica..." It was the first time Claudia had ever used the child's baptismal name — "did she resemble either of her parents?"

"Mrs. Fenster, please—"

"No!" She struggled to keep her voice steady. "No, you see, Doctor, when you saw fit to ... help me to sleep, I thought for a moment I might have heard something, a squeak, a cry from the other room where you'd taken her, and I wanted to go there!"

"It was best that you didn't see. You had suffered enough already!"

"But for what! Doctor, I had a right to see that baby! I believe that I wouldn't be so plagued now if I had

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been able to rest my mind, to see her face, to see her lying peacefully—"

Vincent tilted his head. "Plagued, Mrs. Fenster? How are you plagued."

The words came from the depth unbidden, with a life and force of their own that shocked Claudia as much as they surprised the doctor. "I hear my baby calling for me! Oh, God, that I should believe such a thing, but late at night I hear the voice of a child on the wind, and I know it belongs to Monica. And she wants me so badly, needs to know that I still think of her and still care, and I begin to think that she is somewhere near, just beyond a veil that I must tear down with my own hands if I am to survive. I wake up knowing that Monica is still alive!" Tears prevented her from saying more; Vincent mumbled assurances and took her shoulders to steady and comfort her. She dabbed her eyes, trying to laugh.

"Oh, you must think I'm mad!"

"Not at all," he said with absolute calm. "Let's go a little further." They rounded a turn in the path marked by clusters of white peony. "There is a reason for what has happened to you, and it is perfectly natural; you have suffered a grievous emotional injury. Your mind, in attempting to isolate that hurt and prevent it from occurring again, conjures the illusion that the baby exists somewhere. It gives you hope and prevents you from succumbing to an otherwise devastating depression of spirit."

"But surely hallucinations are a sign of some defect working its way through me."

"Perhaps." Vincent smiled. "I am no expert, of course, but I have read the case histories of a man in Vienna, a Doctor Freud, who has traced the emotional maladies of his patients to their roots deep inside life memories which seemingly were forgotten long ago. He calls this secret inner life the 'subconscious,' and finds it to be a powerful force working in all of us. How may I explain it to you? If you'd cut your finger, say, the bleeding soon stops by itself, even if you do nothing to staunch the wound. I believe that the mind is capable of the same protective action. Now you experience the bleeding — hallucination in this case. But in a little while it will stop. All you must do is recognize what you experience for what it really is and accept the phenomena. Soon they will pass."

She thought of the sounds she heard in the caverns. How could the cries not be real? It frightened her to think that her mind could no longer discriminate between the actual world and the fancies it generated — in secret! — for itself.

"Oh, look!" Vincent said as they emerged from the Grotto along the eastern border of the amusement arcade. "They're going to light the Tower soon." Together, they watched as a brilliant red ball slowly ascended toward the pinnacle of the structure. For the moment, activity in the park

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ceased as everyone waited for the thousands of electric lamps to come to life. Higher and higher the globe climbed, and Claudia felt herself being caught up in the rising excitement. Here was light, made by men to replace the fading beams of the sun.

"We have banished Darkness," she heard the doctor say. Without thinking, she held his arm more tightly, pulling herself close to him, then leaning her head against his shoulder. For a moment, she could sense power in him, rising from the ground beneath their feet, the same power that in a few moments would cause a mere frame of lumber to blaze with an almost celestial glory. Her fears shriveled. Dr. Vincent was right; she had been foolish, and now she knew it, now the cries would vanish and she could get on with the business of living with the people of Corinth, helping her husband to gain the position in society he wanted so desperately.

And then came the sound of a voice that, if loud enough, would have shaken the Tower to bits. *"Mrs. Fenster!"* At first Claudia did not realize who the pinch-faced woman in the gray Temperance uniform was — until she remembered that Mrs. Phillip Ash sometimes did Temperance work at this very park. She gazed at Claudia coolly. There was hatred in her eyes, and triumph too.

"And Doctor Vincent. I had believed you possessed better sense than this."

"This is a chance meeting, Mrs. Ash, nothing more."

"I wonder if her husband would think the same thing. I'm sorry to have seen this, Claudia Fenster. I was beginning to think you were a nice young woman after all." Claudia's heart sank as Mrs. Ash turned abruptly and disappeared into the crowd. Vincent took a step as if to intercept her, but people closed in, craning for a better look and blocking his path.

A moment later they were lost in the sudden, terrifying glare of 80,000 mazda lamps. And above the excited cheering of the crowd, Claudia thought she heard Dr. Vincent say, "And now must Darkness be appeased." Then he was gone.

Two days later and near the same time of evening, Claudia and her husband drove toward the Connor Hotel in the cabriolet Ulysses had hired for the occasion of the Miners' Ball. He was very angry, his arms trembling so much he had difficulty controlling the reins.

"You've ruined me!" he shouted, not caring that his voice carried far along Main Street. "It is bad enough she saw you with a man not your husband in that park, but then to go to her house, to burst in uninvited to scream at her like a disgruntled scullery maid!"

"The woman hates us! Ulysses, how in the name of heaven can you wish to earn favor she will never

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grant? As God is my witness, I would have torn the hair from her head if her driver hadn't come to her rescue! In a day and a half she's poisoned my good name and made you a fool, and yet you still take her side—"

"Silence!" He roared. "You have broken your promise to me, Claudia, you've failed miserably to help me gain what I want most. Do you know what Ash said to me this afternoon? 'Sorry, old man, if it was up to me, you'd be in in a minute. Only Olivia believes your wife is absolutely unsuitable for the auxiliary, and, well, one goes with the other. Maybe next year,' he says. Next year! Your cracked brain has cost me at least ten thousand dollars in new business and possibly much more."

"I'm not cracked! I'm not!"

"I've half a mind to send you home to your father, if the shame wouldn't kill him! You deserve to be a spinster—"

"Ulysses—"

"Let go of my arm, damn you!"

"Turn the coach back, please. We don't have to endure this, don't you understand, it's not me, or you, *it's they* who don't know how to behave! This is Mrs. Ash's circle, the rules are hers. Let's go home. Ulysses, I can please you if you'll just give me the chance. It was father's wish, and I have always tried—"

Without warning he slapped her with the back of his hand. "You have never tried! You made a sick man of your father with your willful behavior, and now you try to do the same with me. But I won't be so easy for you, I swear! You are coming with me down that stairway, and you will smile as they all look at you. You'll smile for the whole world!"

Furiously, he lashed at the horse until they arrived in the front of the hotel. Claudia wiped her eyes and tried desperately to compose herself. She had been foolish to go see Mrs. Ash yesterday, but she had gone only to explain how she had met Dr. Vincent at Electric Park, and then to try, somehow, to reach an understanding with the older woman. But Olivia Ash had fended off any explanation or compromise; instead, viciously, she had berated Claudia for feeling sorry for herself, for thinking herself better than everyone in Corinth simply because she had lost her baby.

"I've lost one; so had Elly Corporan, and Mrs. Blakely. All of us have made the required sacrifice, but you with your whining and moaning are interested only in showing us up. How great a tragedy you suffered, my poor, poor dear—"

It was then that the glee in her eyes had set Claudia off. Something in her, strained to the breaking point, finally snapped, and she'd flown at the other woman fully intent on throttling her. Only Jimbo's quick intervention had prevented a scratching, kicking battle between them.

"You don't know what real sorrow is, dearie," Mrs. Ash had screeched.

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"But you will! Soon enough you will!"

Now Ulysses, jaw set, stood outside the carriage with his arm out, ready to escort her into the ballroom. She made a final, silent plea but he was cold and adamant; Claudia was certain he would carry her inside if she didn't come of her own free will. Together they entered the carpeted lobby, followed a stairway to a mezzanine, then passed through double doors opening onto the grand, carved-rosewood stairs down to the Grand Ballroom. The floor was crowded with the ladies and the men of Corinth, swirling about to the latest Austrian waltzes. The orchestra had been imported from St. Louis; guests had come from that city too, and from Columbia and Springfield, and even the cow town up north, Kansas City. Claudia's heartbeat quickened. The light was dim, and there were people enough that perhaps she could pass unnoticed onto the floor. Then she gasped, as there would be no such luck for her. Mrs. Olivia Ash headed a reception line directly at the foot of the stairs. Ulysses pulled her closer.

"You'll greet her civilly, by God!"

Claudia gathered her skirts, and they descended. Mrs. Ash's eyes were the color and sheen of raven's feathers, but the woman smiled!

"Claudia, my dear! You look lovely." Mrs. Ash took Claudia's shoulders in her cold hands and kissed her on the mouth. Her lips were very dry. "You must be proud of her, Ulysses."

Ulysses was clearly startled. "Eh? Yes. Why, yes, by God! The handsomest woman in the room, present company excluded!" Mrs. Ash laughed in a precise burst.

"Go in, go in! We'll see you both later."

"There!" Ulysses whispered as they walked across the room. "She's a perfectly reasonable woman, and a better Christian than you, offering friendship after your inexcusable behavior. Do you wish to dance?"

"No."

"I see Titus Blakely over there. Perhaps I can repair some of the damage you've caused. Look cheerful, by God!" Claudia watched him move off, then found herself a seat by the balcony doors. As she sat there, she began to realize that the orchestra was slightly off-key and that the guests, who seemed elegant from the vantage at the top of the Grand Staircase, looked a little ragged, their dresses and cutaways stale, perhaps from hanging the whole year in storage against this occasion. This wasn't Paris, after all, nor New York or even Chicago; this was a middling town hard by the borders of Arkansas, Kansas, and the Indian Territory. The people here were acting as they thought grand people ought to act. *They were performing*, almost as if the movement and music were part of a ritual whose purpose they did not understand. Perhaps they did not want to understand.

She searched the room for Ulysses,

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found she could not see him. She felt faint, and the music annoyed her; so she rose and went outside to the balcony for some air.

The doors closed behind her and produced a blessed silence. After a moment, she could hear the faint sound of a far-off calliope, then distant screaming that puzzled and frightened her until she remembered the Washtub at Electric park. The Tower burned magnesium-bright, imposing-looking even seven miles away, and suddenly Claudia longed to be beneath it, feeling the joy of the people who'd come to lose themselves in the light and the color and the sounds of the Arcade. That was so much better than the spectacle inside the ballroom. Claudia put her hand to her face, feeling the cold place where Olivia Ash had kissed her.

You don't know what real sorrow is, dearie!

And then the wind rose, and she heard the cry again. There was no mistaking it, for it was plaintive and cold and seemed to rise from the heart of the darkened city between this balcony and the Tower to the north. She held her breath, praying desperately for the sound to be just another hallucination, but it came again, louder, shaking her to her soul. For an instant, she almost fainted, but then anger tore through her fear.

"Why?" she yelled, gripping the balcony rail, "Why must I suffer this!" But there was no answer, only the cry of a child on the warm night wind. Claudia looked out and could see the tops of the hickory trees that sheltered the entrance to the Crystal Caverns no more than a hundred yards from where she stood. Dr. Vincent had told her confidently that her emotional wounds would staunch themselves. Now Claudia knew that something far more serious was happening, that she must take action or the child in her mind would live on and destroy what was left of her life.

Quickly she looked into the ballroom. There was no sign of Ulysses, or Mrs. Ash or anyone else Claudia knew. Before the balcony doors was a long table with a display of polished miner's tools. Claudia took a brass coal-oil lamp, shook it to test for fuel, then ran outside and down the steps to the back of the hotel, trying to reassure herself as she hurried along toward the caves. *It is a rational thing I'm doing.... Proving to myself that this thing, this voice ... this child! ... does not, cannot exist. Monica was dead before she ever left my womb!*

She reached the grove, approached the switch box to turn on the cavern lights. Something grabbed her arm, and she cried out, dropping the lantern. The glass chimney broke with a sound that was almost like bells.

"Mis' Fenster." The black, impassive face materialized from the darkness.

"J-Jimbo? What are you doing here?" The anger came back. "Let go of me!"

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"You don't want to go down there, Mis' Fenster." His eyes glittered in the moonlight, but there was no hostility in his long, wrinkled face, only sadness. Claudia recovered a little.

"I — I must go down. I believe I may have lost something valuable when I was here Wednesday. A brooch. Have you found one?"

"No, mis'."

"Well, then, I must have a look for my—" She halted, because clear and very loud came the cry, not once, but three times and echoing within the walls of the caverns. There was no mistaking it now, for Jimbo was clearly startled. Gently, Claudia pried his fingers free of her arm.

"Your given name is James?"

"Yes."

"James what?"

"I'm James Woods, Mis' Fenster, and I'm askin' you not to go down. Your child's lost once, leave it be."

"I am going down." Her voice was terribly calm. "Wait for me here, please."

James Woods shrugged finally and threw the light switch. Claudia descended the path that led into the earth, slowing to listen when she reached the card tables. There was a murmuring — maybe only the stirring of the cave wind — but then she saw that the boards had been removed from the passageway over Indian Hell. Silently cursing her trailing gown and wishing she had not broken her lantern, Claudia stepped over the pulled-away planks into a passage dark enough to swallow her whole.

At the moment she heard the cry for the third time that night, a light sputtered on ahead of her. Claudia gathered her skirts and ran, heedless of where the ledge was, or that she might fall into the abyss. A draft rose from below, humid and smelling of the earth, and she was conscious of descending slightly into a larger space and the sound of water trickling as she skirted an outcropping of dark rock and saw them waiting for her.

Men and women held torches whose light failed in the deep crevasse beyond the ledge: men and women Claudia knew. There was Dr. Vincent, wearing traces of a smile on his face, and Elly Corporan and Mrs. Burgess. In the shadows just beyond this circle she saw Phillip Ash and Ulysses, who colored and looked away.

In the center, Olivia Ash, who held in her arms a most remarkable child that was perhaps a year old. Her skin was the color of bone china, her hair silk-fine and white as sugar or salt, while grave eyes, huge like the eyes of a deer focused on Claudia. There was a spark of recognition, then: *"Maaamaaa!"*

"Come in, my dear," Mrs. Ash said, her reedy voice echoing in the darkness. "She wants you, and it's time." Claudia rushed forward, pushing through the circle and snatching the baby away, to Mrs. Ash's laughter.

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"She has been well cared for, though she's never seen the sun and never shall. Jimbo's been her mother and kept her well for this."

"Monica?" The child pressed close, and Claudia felt the beating of her tiny heart. Her mouth formed the word: *Why?*

"We live by what we take from the earth and in return she demands something of us. I've given, so has Elly; all of us who live from the earth must offer and give in return. You must give the child now. When you do, you'll be fertile again. You'll have as many more as you want."

"No! Ulysses!" But she could not see him because of the torches. "I won't give her up! Not again."

"You will, or you'll fall too. It won't be the first time. Present the child!"

"No!"

"Doctor, perhaps you can make the decision easier." Claudia saw Vincent step from the circle with a cloth pad in hand; she caught the sharp odor of ether. *"Not again! Lord God, not again!"* Her baby clutched at her dress as the circle closed around her, pushing her toward the brink, Vincent smiling at her, Olivia Ash laughing louder and louder—

She held Monica tightly under both her tiny arms, then suddenly, with a burst of desperate energy, swung the child around as though she were nothing but a sack of grain. The little feet caught Olivia Ash squarely in the breast, sending her gasping back into Dr. Vincent. Monica howled with fright.

"You fool!" Mrs. Ash screamed. "You'll ruin us all! Grab her, somebody!"

"No! This is my baby, understand me, mine, mine! If you want her again, you'll have to take her. How about it?" She held Monica out at arm's length toward Mrs. Ash and moved forward, shaking the baby like a doll. "Take her from me!" Mrs. Ash opened her arms. "Take her. *Take her!*" With a sudden thrust, she used the wailing child as a weapon for the second time, holding onto her clothing with her fists as she pushed Monica forward into Mrs. Ash and lunged, pushing with her legs as hard as she could before pulling back suddenly at the brink of the pit. Mrs. Ash screamed as she went over. The scream continued for a long, long time, and while it lasted, Claudia turned and ran before the others could recover from their shock and pursue her. She ran until her lungs felt as though they'd burst, and then she saw stars and heard the wind stirring the hickory trees.

James Woods blocked her path.

"I can't let you go, Mis' Fenster. That girl don't belong to you no more."

"You raised her. You fed her, damn you! Can't you see she wants to live? Can't you? Can't you? Let me take the wagon, please!"

"Mis' Ash—"

"Is dead! Do you understand, I've

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killed her for what she's done to us. God Almighty, they're coming!"

James Woods shifted his weight. Shouts of rage and confusion came from the mouth of the caverns. Monica whimpered, blinking painfully as though even starlight was too much for her. And then, suddenly, James turned and yanked open the switch for the cavern lights. Both of them listened to the screams.

"They took what they wanted out of her. Now she'll take back what she wants." As he said this, he helped mother and child onto the buckboard.

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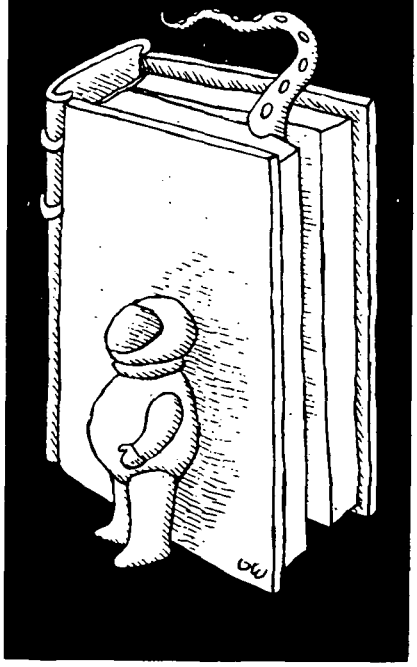

Drawing by Gahan Wilson

International Science Fiction

Aelita by Alexei N. Tolstoy, Macmillan, $11.95.

Andromeda by Ivan Yefremov, Progress Publishers, $7.00.

Space Apprentice by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, Macmillan, $11.95.

Beetle In The Anthill by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, Macmillan, $11.95

Chronolysis by Michel Jeury, Macmillan, $10.95

Hermit's Swing by Victor Kolupaev, Macmillan, $9.95

Terra SF, Edited by Richard D. Nolane, DAW Books, $2.25

We have entered the ludicrous period of SF publishing, when bad works do not merely eclipse good ones, but bury them three times over; even honest entertainments lack craft and literacy. Showbiz editors act like superstars at conventions, while ambitious writers line up hat in hand for advances which do not equal an editor's expense account. Broken promises, cronyism, and rudeness have all been on the upswing as more money has come into the field. Editorial conflicts of interest have increased: some editors review books they publish; editors sit on awards juries and push their own books; a few editors have affairs with authors and publish their work. The *Analog* reviewer quibbles over a genuine masterpiece by Gene Wolfe while extolling a Longyear product. The same reviewer tells us that the Macmillan international books will seem *alien* to Western readers (strange thing for

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an SF reviewer to say, and how dare he speak for the rest of us!). The air of the decently educated and middle brow that used to hover over the SF community is disappearing.

Against this background of flashing word processors, twitching Selectric balls and the green glow of money, I think it urgent to try to answer anew the question of what is worthwhile in fiction, and to call attention to the hardest lesson that a reader of fiction can learn: that *enjoyable is not the same as good*, even though good may sometimes be enjoyable.

What can we field against these miserable attitudes and conditions?

We can say that it's a great and damaging failure to act (if not believe) as if the worst judgment about a work of fiction is equal to the best, to say different things on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and claim correctness each day; to expect that we must necessarily feel enjoyment in reading a great work, and displeasure at a bad one.

The question of what is good and bad in fiction may seem passé and impractical (it angers too many people); but I would like to face the issues if not the individuals who now preside over a moribund SF publishing climate (by that I mean the lack of editorial leadership in the form of editors who are primarily judges of fiction; anyone can acquire a good work once in a while), where slavish adaptation to imagined buying habits of readers is the norm.

But first let's consider the books in hand; good or bad, they will aid our understanding of the general problem.

Aelita is a wild adventure story from 1922, owing as much to *A Princess of Mars* by Burroughs as to Wells's *First Men In the Moon*. Although the story presents a first trip to Mars, portions are somewhat satirical of the early Soviet Union. The novella is written with economy and vigor; the spare characterizations are psychologically sound. The writing often breaks out into moments of lyrical beauty and vivid description. The science and lost race background are nonsense, proving that a good writer can make you believe that he's made a silk purse out of a sow's ear. The writing occasionally slips into an off-handed sloppiness, but it veers back into precise focus. It's hard not to like this book, but its thinking is often simple-minded, its drama silly. The love affair btween Aelita and Los, the scientist from Earth, is endearing but sentimental. Gusev, Los's soldier of fortune companion, is a ludicrous meddler (a sentimental wolf left over from the revolution). Los scolds him admirably for his expansionist views.

A witty intelligence crafted this book, but the author was working well below his abilities. The story must have seemed very new and striking once. Enjoyable, worth reading as an historical example, but not a good book, despite the fun, color and

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pathos. Does this sound paradoxical? Many worthy novels are like this; but if their virtues are things you value above all others, then you'll turn a blind eye to the faults. (Translated by Antonina W. Bouis). The novel was filmed in 1924; earlier translation, 1957.

Andromeda, Yefremov's venerated classic, has been reprinted for the third time in English. The original edition has been reissued more than thirty times, not counting numerous translations. Westerners may find it hard to see why it deserves its reputation; the clumsy translation, unrevised from the 1959 edition, does not help, though I understand that the Russian is not much better. The impression of the novel as a work which seriously seeks to show a vastly different social future shines brighter in my memory than when I was reading through the book's four hundred pages; curiously, the novel continues to improve in retrospect, and there are a number of good reasons for this. A humane, progressive scientist, Yefremov the writer was capable of vivid descriptions and occasionally effective subjective passages, despite his meager literary gifts. His ideas about the danger of atomic power, feminism and male behavior, seem quite modern (his notions of personal fulfillment would not seem out of place in California); but his future of three thousand years hence presents archaic details side by side with striking medical, social, and astrophysical speculations. Still, we do glimpse a future where things might not only be different, but better; Yefremov's thinking can be very plausible, despite his faults.

The romance of a society devoted to knowing and feeling, to knowledge and exploration of the galaxy, keeps renewing one's interest with a flow of pointed situations and original problems — merely told, not written; even the best descriptions (the landing on the planet of the black sun), though they aspire to poetry, are simply good. When it was written, at the start of the thaw of the Sputnik era, the novel appealed to a long repressed humane utopian tradition in Soviet society, to Russians who saw in the book a hope for a more moderate Soviet Union, one that might strike a true balance between individual and social needs; the author's ethical concerns come through with little propaganda of the Soviet kind. One might even suspect the author of being a bit innocent and sheltered.

Andromeda has been credited with turning Soviet science fiction to the social sciences, away from the purely adventurous and technical kind of SF. The same thing happened to British and American SF in the 50's. Yefremov's utopia is interesting in that it permits great diversity, tolerates human frailty, and has a keen sense of the past; as such it is Wellsian, stressing the idea of a dynamic utopia, not the static, straw-man model usually associated with the term. Worth reading. Alternately interesting, entertaining,

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involving, and dull. Important in the history of SF, but not an outstanding piece of fiction, despite the author's intelligence and charm. Valuable because it is about something important; preferable to a stylish, empty-headed work, but not an all-around success. A great example of how notions of good and bad and valuable in fiction may be put to the test in a complex work. Translated by George Hanna, this edition includes a photo of Yefremov (1907-1972), an autobiographical foreword, and a new cover. The text and illustrations are reduced in size from the original edition.

Unlike Yefremov, the Strugatsky brothers developed toward a darker, more critical and satirical view of human nature and social possibility. *Space Apprentice* is nearer Yefremov in its depiction of Yuri Borodin's idealism about working and living away from the earth, but as his episodic chronicle continues, it becomes clear that human beings have taken all their old problems out into the solar system, and that the ancient frailties and failings must still be opposed with the humane weapons of reason, love, courage and compassion. Filled with interesting characters, this book is both enjoyable and good, though its picture of the planets is dated, and will continue to date. (Translated by Antonina W. Bouis).

Beetle In the Anthill appears to be the most recent novel by the Strugatskys. In a future society ruled by experts, one man endangers the social order. Maxim Kammerer must find this man and unravel the mystery of his danger. A dark, moody story, this book carries the same excitement as the remarkable *Roadside Picnic*. The sense of strangeness, both human and alien, is overpowering. Suspenseful and intriguing, the novel is both enjoyable and good, offering a provocative and thoughtful experience. Russian SF has come a long way from Yefremov and Tolstoy in this novel.

Chronolysis, an award winner in France, has not been well received in English. This book is the first of a major trilogy whose theme is time. The author displays an impressively poetic subjectivity; the dream images are endless and haunting, as if Ballard had collaborated with Dick. Presumably, Macmillan will give us the two other volumes in time. Undoubtedly a good book of its kind, it will certainly not be enjoyed by everyone. I say undoubtedly because I can't fault the book's technique, language, theme, structure, etc. A sophisticated performance, but not fun to read, as most people mean that; obviously *good* must mean more than enjoyable. (Translated by Maxim Jakubowski.)

Hermit's Swing is a collection by a newer Soviet SF writer (born 1936). The title novella and "The Biggest House" are the best of the selection, but even these are only mildly interesting. The skill and talent seem to be there, but the ambition seems lacking

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in the choice of materials. The stories are filled with pleasing details, with good characters, but the tales don't seem to be about anything else but themselves. Enjoyable and good, but very mildly. (Translated by Helen Saltz Jacobson.)

DAW Books continues its list of foreign SF. *Terra SF* is the most contemporary selection I've seen to date of European science fiction, with outstanding stories by Lundwall, Jeury, Van Herck, and Mårtenson, to mention the best. The editor contributes a pointed introduction and a good short story of his own. The notes about the authors are useful. It's not every day that an American reader is confronted with so much information about writers unknown to him. It's fun to read authors for the first time and make up your own mind with no previous hype.

So why is enjoyable not the same as good?

Because we have all sometimes liked bad novels and hated good ones. What is sufficient to make a work of fiction worthy is that it *also* be about something substantial, emotionally moving *and* intellectually stimulating; and *this* may be what we *mean* by enjoyable. It follows then, to the dismay of the simpleminded, that many substantial works are not always enjoyable, while many enjoyable works are empty-headed. It sometimes happens that a work has everything.

But what do you mean by good and bad?

I assume a world of values behind my judgment calls. I have nothing to say to a reviewer who writes to entertain, or to a reader who seeks to be amused by reviews. Aside from the technical problem of how well an author carries out his avowed intent, the question of good and bad seems beyond the grasp of writers and critics. I suspect that they don't want it to be otherwise; yet we do not have to bow down to rampant taste. We have only to observe how we read, and how reading grows and deepens with practice.

It's a matter of learning yardstick measures, or values, which begin as moments of appreciation in the act of reading: we *like* finding out what happens next in a story; we are *curious* about the people; we are *pleased* by the visual, emotional, social, even philosophical situations. We acquire such values by discovering them in ourselves. They increase in number as life grows complex, intensifying resonances within us. It follows that works with numerous values are the best, since it is better to appreciate more than less.

This does not mean that reading for vicarious experience, or for what happens next, must be discouraged, as long as you know that this is not the whole game. A reader is like a contemplative god, who, it is to be hoped, *grows* in wakefulness and attention.

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Greatness in literature is rarely narrow; even a concentrated vision acquires a complex resonance. A good writer strives to awaken more than one mode of appreciation in the reader.

Time should see growth in the number, manner and application of a reader's measuring values; if the years find you reading for one or two values, and you don't even suspect that there are more, then you are like a tone deaf person.

All this explains the popularity of certain obviously bad works; they contain elements which are valued above all others by readers. It can be stated in neutral terms: if you don't value certain elements, the work is *bad;* the values it does have may be outside your range. A good example is Damon Knight's story "Masks," which often baffles so-called "hard science" readers, when on the face of it you would think they would like it.

There are many elements to be prized, especially in science fiction and fantasy; but a great work has a large number of them in some kind of balance, along with a few intangibles. Sadly, a great work usually lacks a large number of great readers. Few SF readers want more than a kind of effective story simplicity, which is okay if you know what you're doing; but so many readers and writers like to think they're doing much more.

And, sadness upon sadness, the fact is that SF can do more, has done more; but these works are the objects of little more than lip service; they are the hype models used by publishers when they blurb a book as "in the tradition of." I can live with craftsmanlike commercial entertainment, but must it drive out ambitious SF completely? If SF is a literature of limitless potential, as all agree, even the blurbers, then to limit it is a betrayal, one which forces editors and writers to live a lie, a contradiction, and to call upon that contradiction to justify its continuation.

Okay, so it's important to insist upon values in bad times, and there's no theoretical mystery in telling good from bad; but it's in the application of standards that critics and readers will differ. So we're back where we started; rampant taste wins.

Not at all. Critics may fail to see that a work contains, or lacks, certain values, but we don't have to fall back on vague *taste,* which is often the mark of an inexperienced reader, who may or may not develop. Remember, there are readers who never question their tastes, and others who don't even remember what they read.

We're all free to like or dislike a book, however vague this sounds; but we're not as free to call it good or bad. We can say the words, but a case based on a work's merits exists implicitly without us, waiting to be made (in the sense that you can't just make up *anything* about a book). One of the most mind boggling moments for a writer is to meet a reader who loves your book for all the reasons you despise, usually

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unconnected with the work, and then to meet a reader who hates your novel for the same reasons! You're grateful for the love, but it's just as worthless as the hate.

There are quite a few fine books (containing a long list of values) which I don't seem to like, and some bad ones which I do like (I don't apologize for these; I simply don't claim that they're good); but the vagaries of human sympathies have nothing to do with critical judgment, which must always seek *some* definable standard. In the game of life and art, feelings without reason whelp irrational enigmas, while reason without feelings gives us works unconnected with our fallible humanity. It is no accident that the 1930's of the Third Reich saw the great popularity of wish-fulfillment heroic fantasy based on magic and the occult.

We're not back to rampant taste; we can list and agree on many of the value-measures which belong to great works, even if we have to admit that the open systems of literary creation can never be completely defined. We can see now how it is possible for very intelligent reviewers to be stupid. If you begin with an *insufficient store of measuring values*, then your intelligence (loyal servant of our prejudices and sympathies) will work hard to make a case, even if it means brilliantly defending dumb ideas. Lawyers are obligated to this every day. The smarter you are, the dumber you may get in your pronouncements. Willful stupidity. Nothing to do with basic intelligence.

The books reviewed in this column vary in the number of measuring-values they contain, and in the way these virtues are orchestrated; observing and responding to them is all that can honestly be done, exhaustive precision is not possible in trying to understand the curious, variegated, inner worlds that we call novels and stories. Nothing can replace the reading of them, growing with them, knowing them at their best, taking them into ourselves, where they come to life.

And here is my best shot at defining a good piece of fiction: because works of fiction must be subjectively recreated by the reader, because they live within (and this is doubly true of fantastic works), they must carry a strong reference to matters outside their own internal inventions, in the same way that a scientific theory must rejoin experience through a public experiment or remain an empty possibility; the alternative is solipsism, formal play; meaning (playing for keeps in the irreversible arena of life) is lost. Works of fiction which are only about themselves are empty novelties.

Experienced readers know that it is often unwise to try reading a book you're not ready for; reviewers cause a lot of heartache by ramming such books through their unwilling brains. There are many great books for which some readers will never be ready; we're not a first class species yet. As the

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They were the greatest fighting fleet in the universe—battling betrayal and revenge, and the terrible fate that awaited them on the edge of the

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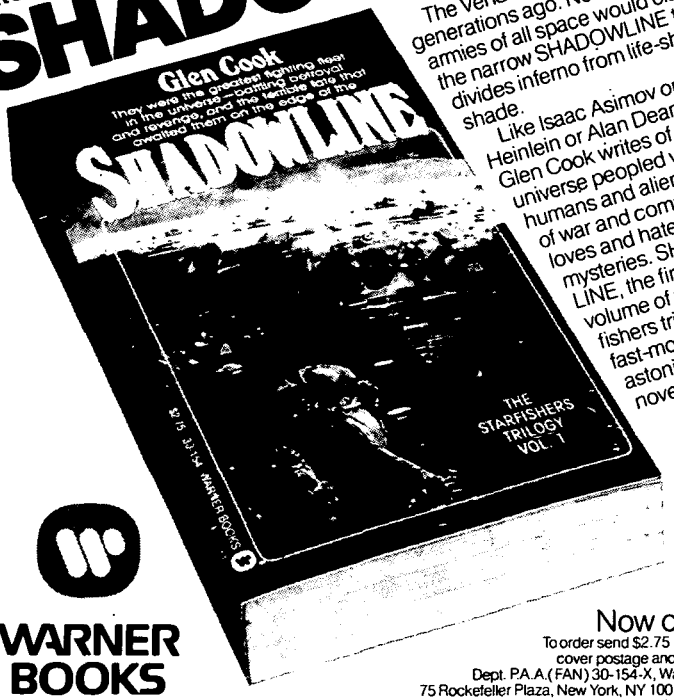
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genie said of us in the film, THE THIEF OF BAGDAD, "When their stomach speaks, they forget their head; when their head speaks, they forget their stomach; and when their heart speaks, they forget everything!"

James Gunn recently provided me with a description which not only ends forever the antagonism between SF and the rest of literature, but helps establish a value-measure for a truly distinguished science fiction. Traditionally, SF's references, allusions, are to science and technology (even when it's technophobic and anti-science), to fantastic things beyond common experience. This accounts for much of the integrity of SF (the degree of authenticity to be found in its references and imagination; its writing standards are

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not measurable in any unique way), even when it seems to fail in all the *writerly* things — depiction of human character, style, the ability to move us to pity, love, or hatred, a sense of history and life as it is lived. The best science fiction must do it all, presenting us with a double horizon — human experience and future possibility.

We've had some of this from Benford, Le Guin, Dick, Lem, Clarke, Wolfe, and others. They continue the Campbellian striving for a better hard SF (hard all around), a fiction of "broader visions and deeper humanity," in Benford's words, which Campbell's surviving disciples have mostly failed to understand.

Why worry about all these complicated things? Because the editing and publishing arena for SF is more corrupt than it has ever been. There are editors who tell you that they buy what sells, and that they don't care about the intrinsic merits of a work. If you care about what you write or read, then you feel obliged to demand that publishers challenge readers with what is published, not simply stroke them, thus further degrading the values of readers and writers alike; the comedy of it is that this debased fiction buying environment becomes the justification for what editors acquire for publication. Editors are degraded also, because to survive in their niches they must buy what will keep them their jobs.

Well, it hasn't all been crap, it isn't, and it doesn't have to be, if we can get some sense of values into high places. For most writers, the migrant worker way of life is the only way possible to be a writer; he or she would often do it for nothing, which makes it more than a job — it's work they can't stop doing, however badly it's paid; this makes the writer a victim. Rich or poor, the writer cannot help his fellows much; all that's left is persuasion. A reader rarely sees the chain of choices that have been made, from the author's decision to write the book for almost nothing (compared to what most people are paid for their time), the editor's and publisher's decisions about what they can sell and the manner in which the work will be presented, the choices of the sales force that will make or break a book, etc. Intrinsic merit seems to get last or no consideration, even though it's all that counts in the end.

What about sales? Worthy books can't do worse than the committee and sales force dominated productions, *which don't sell just as often;* but a good book has long term potential. Too many fine works have gone this route for it to be doubted, and to surrender this insight is to put the hoodlums in charge of literature. Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot we were only talking about science fiction.

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Here is a rare and surprising short story from Gardner Dozois who is known mostly as a novelist (STRANGERS), critic and editor. The story will be included in an anthology titled UNICORNS, edited by Dozois and Jack Dann, to be published by Ace.

The Sacrifice

BY

GARDNER DOZOIS

There were four of them who entered the haunted darkness of the Old Forest that night, but only three who would return, because three was a magic number.

Featherflower walked silently beside her father Nightwind, her head high, trying not to stumble over the twisted, snakelike roots that seemed to snatch at her legs, trying not to flinch or start at the sinister noises of the forest, the wailing and hooting of things that might be birds, the rustling and crackling of the undergrowth as unseen bodies circled around them in the secret blackness of the night. Her heart was pounding like a fist inside her, but she would not let herself show fear — she was a chief's daughter, after all, and though he led her now to an almost certain death, she would not betray his dignity or her own. Firehair walked slightly ahead of them, as befitted a young war leader in the prime of his strength, but his steps were slow and sometimes faltering, the whites of his eyes showing as he looked around him, and Featherflower took a bitter and strength-giving pleasure from the unspoken but undeniable fact that he was more afraid than she was. Grim old Lamefoot brought up the rear, his scarred and graying body moving silently as a ghost, imperturbable, his steps coming no faster or slower than they ever did.

They had been silent since the trees had closed out the sky overhead — the Old Forest at night had never been a place that encouraged inconsequential chatter, but this silence was heavy and sour and unyielding, pressing down upon them more smotheringly even than the fey and enchanted darkness that surrounded them. Featherflower could sense her father's agony, the

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grief and guilt that breathed from him like a bitter wind, but she would not make it easier for him by deed or gesture or word. She was the one who was to be sacrificied — why should she comfort *him*? She knew her duty as well as he knew his, had been born to it, and she would not fight or seek to escape, but it hurt her in her heart that Nightwind — her *father* — would do this thing to her, however grave the need, and she would not make it easier for him. Let it be hard, as it soon would be hard for her, let him hurt and sweat and cry aloud with the hardness of it.

So they walked through the forest in silence and guilty enmity and fear, the great and living darkness walking with them, a-bristle with watching eyes, until ahead there was a glitter of light.

The forest opened up around them into a small meadow, drenched with brilliant silver moonlight. At the far end of the meadow rose an enormous oak tree, a giant of the forest, its huge branches spread high above them like waiting, encircling arms.

"Here," said old Lamefoot the wizard. "He will come *here*."

When they had crossed the meadow and stood beneath the arms of the oak tree, Featherflower said quietly, "Father, must this be?"

Nightwind sighed. "The trees do not bloom, the streams dry up, the grass is sere ... It has been long and long since such a thing was done, and I had hoped my time would pass before it was again needful, but clearly the gods have turned their faces away..." He fell silent again, looking very old. "*He* will come here," Lamefoot said in his grim gray voice, "and if he accepts you, then the powers will smile on us again..." Firehair looked guiltily away from her, glanced nervously around him with wide frightened eyes and said only "It is for the good of the Folk..."

She blew out her lips at him in scorn, snorting derisively. "Then for the good of the Folk, I will stay," she said, and sat herself down beneath the giant old oak.

Lamefoot studied her closely. "You will not run away, child?"

"No," she said calmly. "I will not run away..."

They watched her for a while longer then, but there was nothing more for anyone to say, and so at last they went away and left her there, Nightwind giving one last agonized look back before the darkness swallowed them.

She was alone in the Old Forest.

Trembling, she waited beneath the ancient oak. Never had she been so afraid. The dark shapes of the trees seemed to press menacingly close around the meadow, kept at bay only by the silver moonlight. A bat flittered by through that moonlight, squeaking, and she flinched away from it. Something howled away across the cold and silent reaches of the forest, howled again in a voice like rusty old iron. Featherflower's head turned constantly

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as she sought to look in all directions at once, straining wide-eyed to pierce the gloom beneath the trees. She would not give way to fear, she would not give way to fear ... but her defenses were crumbling, being sluiced away by a rising flood of terror.

A crashing in the forest, growing louder, coming nearer, the sound of branches bending and snapping, leaves rustling, the sound of some large body forcing its brute way through the entangling undergrowth...

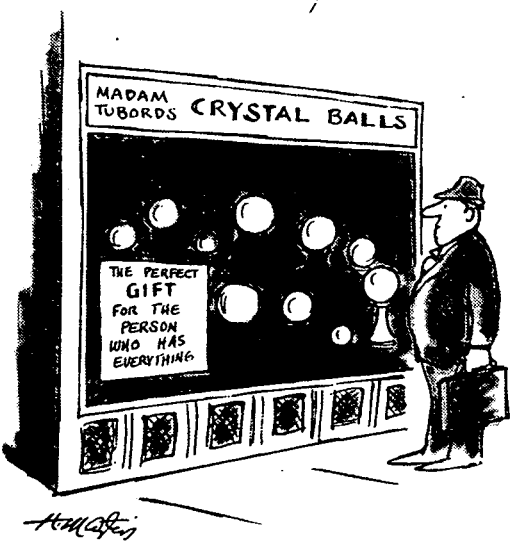
She looked away, fear choking her like a hand, stopping her breath.

Something *coming*...

There was movement among the trees, the bare branches stirring gently as though moved by the ghost of the wind, and when she looked again *he* was there, seeming to materialize from the dappled leaf-shadows, his head held high, paler than the moonlight, clothed in the awful glory of his flesh, so noble and swift-moving and puissant, so proud and lordly of bearing that all fear vanished from her and she felt her heart melt within her with poignant and unbearable love.

Their eyes met, her's shy and guileless, his bright and clear and wild, liquid as molten gold. She tossed her own head back, moonlight gleaming from the long white horn that protruded from her forehead, and pawed nervously at the ground with a tiny silver hoof.

He came to her then across the broken ground, the human, moving as lightly and soundlessly as mist, and laid his terrible head in her lap.



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Detective Sergeant David Amaro becomes involved in an act of vengeance that reaches across the grave in this skillful blend of ghost and detective story. Lee Killough's most recent novel is DEADLY SILENTS.

The Existential Man

BY
LEE KILLOUGH

The condemned man had never known greater terror or anger. In the trunk of the car he struggled against the cords binding his wrists and ankles. He fought the gag in his mouth. He had to free himself; if he did not, he would die. And if he died, how could he denounce this killer, trusted by the people around him, as the betrayer, the Cain, he was? Who would avenge the pain and death he had caused, and prevent more sure to come? The car had stopped what seemed like hours ago, but the trunk remained closed. How could the killer sit out there casually fishing? What was he waiting for?

Suddenly the trunk lid opened, and the condemned man knew why the killer waited. Outside, darkness had fallen. No one would see him pulled from the trunk and killed.

As the killer reached in for him, he kicked desperately with his bound ankles, but his legs, cramped from the hours in the trunk, moved without control. The killer sidestepped easily and reaching in, grabbed the front of the condemned man's throat to haul him out of the trunk.

The killer said, "I hope you've been saying your confession."

He could not see the killer's face. So it stood to reason the killer could not see his, either, in the darkness, but he still glared. *You won't get away with this,* he vowed. *I will not die. I refuse to die. I won't rest, either, until you're punished.* He wished he could say it aloud.

The killer pushed him face down on the sandy earth above the river bank. A knee in the middle of his back held him there. The hard, cold muzzle of a gun pressed against the back of his head.

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Terror and fury blazing to new heights in him, he swore. *You can't be rid of me, you bastard. Wherever you are and Wherever I am, I'll find a way to get you. I'll —*

The thought ended abruptly in a ripping explosion.

Sergeant David Amaro swallowed to keep his lunch down, no easy accomplishment in the face of the corpse's appearance and smell. Why had he volunteered to take this call, he wondered. There he had been in the cool, air-conditioned detectives' room when some mad impulse made him offer to head out into the August heat to investigate a body found in the Ballard salvage yard. He took some consolation in the fact that Dr. Miles Jacobs, the Flint County Coroner, looked just as green as David felt.

Squinting into the car trunk through air so hot it shimmered before him, David asked, "How long do you think he's been in there, doc?"

"Months," Jacobs replied. "All summer at least."

How had it gone undiscovered until now, David wondered. He noticed that Tom Saskova, who along with Rick Dlabal and David had taken the call, stood well upwind with the yard owner to talk to him. Their voices reached David as the coroner and ambulance attendants shooed the gathered flies and performed the grisly task of moving the corpse onto a stretcher.

"Don't you come back to this end of the yard regularly?"

"Only when I need parts," Ballard replied. "These are forties and fifties cars. Not much call for parts from them."

"But there was today?"

Ballard nodded. "A kid needing a radiator from a forty-nine Ford. I came back looking for one and, like I told you before, I saw this trunk closed. It shouldn't have been. I thought maybe some kids had been playing in here — they climb over the fence once in a while, though they're not supposed to — and came over to open it again. I saw it was wired shut and I smelled —" He swallowed audibly. "After I cut the wire and saw inside, I called you guys right away."

"The yard is locked at night?"

"With a bolt and chain through the gates, yes."

"Could anyone have driven back here during the day?"

"No. We have the barrier up front. We bring heavy stuff ourselves with our truck. I don't want anyone back here loading without me knowing what."

Identifying the man was not going to be fun, David reflected. Nothing much remained of his face. Did they have a chance at fingerprints? "When you do the autopsy, doc, save his fingers. We'll send them to Topeka." Perhaps the Kansas Bureau of Investigation's crime lab could bring up prints.

"Will do, sergeant. Now, please ex-

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cuse me." The coroner fled.

David wished he could leave. He thought longingly of city police departments with teams of crime lab technicians for work like this. Wataka PD detectives drew the whole enchilada: crime scene search, investigation, everything.

"You want to search him here or at the hospital?" Rick Dlabal asked.

"Might as well get it over with now, I guess," David replied.

He took a pair of rubber gloves out of the crime scene kit and pulled them on, but as he touched the dead man, he found himself caught suddenly in a storm of emotions. They broke like thunder in his head: furious anger, bowel-loosening terror, and driving urgency. Sweat trickled down his sides under his shirt. *Get him,* a voiceless cry sounded in his head. *Get the dirty bastard who did this to me.*

"Dave?" Dlabal asked. "What's wrong?"

"Just queasy," David replied quickly. People in the department already looked at him dubiously enough — who would have thought a single day would seem so important until he lost it? — without telling anyone that he felt the last emotions of a dead man lingering in the air like the stench of putrefaction, reaching back across the grave in a plea for vengeance.

He did not particularly care about this corpse, either. The manner of death, bound and shot in the back of the head, suggested an execution, perhaps a case of thieves falling out, some dispute bleeding over from Saunders, the town on the outskirts of nearby Fort Flint. There were other bodies David had seen this year who deserved righteous wrath more: the Chaffin girl, raped and strangled in April, and three other high school kids dead of drug overdoses. And yet, as he went through the dead man's clothing, he felt the silent cry for justice more compellingly than he had ever experienced with a victim before.

Without surprise, he found the pockets all empty and the hands bare of watch or rings. He stepped back to let the attendants zip the corpse into its plastic bag and wheel it away.

Together with Dlabal and Saskova, he went over the car and the area around it, inch by inch, though all of them knew the probable futility. Months of heat and wind would have wiped out most, possibly all, traces related to moving the body in.

Then Dlabal said, "Dave, look." He pointed to a shredded piece of cloth caught on top of the chain-link fence along the rear of the salvage yard. It looked similar to the dead man's suit.

"Take a picture."

After Dlabal recorded its presence photographically, David measured the fence and the distance to it from the car and added it to the crime scene sketch. Then they pulled the cloth loose and dropped it in a plastic evidence envelope.

David stared thoughtfully through

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the fence to the strip of woods beyond and down through it to the Flint River. "We'll search the river banks, too."

After finishing in the yard, the three of them combed the river bank a quarter of a mile in each direction. They found plenty of trash and tracks, but none that appeared more than a few weeks old, and what they found seemed more related to fishing and canoeing than murder. Late in the afternoon, they called it quits and headed back with relief for the air conditioning of the office.

In the Law Enforcement Center across the alley from the County Court House, David greeted a couple of deputy sheriffs coming out of their office before pushing through the door into the detectives' room on the PD side of the corridor. Peeling off his coat and loosening his tie, he dropped into his desk chair and leaned back, sighing.

"Tired, Dave?"

He looked up at Lieutenant James Christopher. "Parboiled is more like it. It's hot as hell out there." He reached for a report form to roll into his typewriter.

"I wondered if maybe you haven't been sleeping. You looked tired even coming in this morning. Are you still having nightmares?"

David bit his lip. "Sometimes," he admitted.

"The same one?"

He sounded like Dr. Mayes, David thought sourly. What was it with people? Make a few visits to a shrink, and everyone acts as though they're expecting a guy to come unglued any moment. What was one day, for god's sake, twenty-four lousy hours?

And, yet, it had been frightening. He had kissed Kris and the kids goodbye that April Tuesday and driven straight to the office, but when he walked in, everyone fell on him. Where had he been? What happened? As the excitement sorted out, he discovered that he walked into the office not on Tuesday, but *Wednesday*. He had come in Tuesday, all right, perfectly normal. He had left again, though, to check out leads to the China White that had appeared recently in the area, and not come back. A uniformed officer found his car at the high school and established that David had been there talking to friends of the two kids who had died of the junk, but that was as far as he could be traced.

Neither hypnosis nor psychiatric consultation had succeeded in jogging loose the forgotten memories. It was not true, what several fellow officers obliquely suggested, that David did not want to remember. Of course he wanted to. Not knowing what happened left him with a vague dread, a constant feeling of something unpleasant about to happen. The missing day nagged him. Where could he have been to come back without physical injury, clean-shaven and neatly dressed but with pockets as empty as his head ... gun, ID, handcuffs, keys, everything

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missing ... even his watch and wedding ring? All that remained was a recurring nightmare.

"Not the same one," he lied to Lt. Christopher. "Do you want to know about the body?"

"Sure."

David consulted his notebook. "Male, black hair, about five-eleven. Hard to tell about complexion but probably swarthy. That, together with the texture of the hair, suggests he may be Hispanic. Weight and age uncertain right now. He wasn't splattered inside the trunk. So he had to be brought in the yard already dead. From where, we don't know yet."

"What's your game plan from here?"

"While I'm waiting for Jacobs to do the autopsy, I'll check the missing persons lists around the area for the past — oh — nine months, just to be safe. I'll send his fingers up to the KBI lab for them to work on prints. And I'll see what the intelligence on the street is about local criminal disputes. We'll probably have it wrapped up in a few days." But as he began typing his preliminary report, still feeling the anger of the dead man in his head, a niggling worry wondered if it would be that simple.

David ran, as always, down a long, dark tunnel, a roar like the noise of a great train thundering in his ears. He ran because behind him lay terror. He did not know what it was, but he *did* know that he could not bring himself to look at it, and did not dare let it catch him. Ahead, the end of the tunnel glowed golden. He sensed sanctuary and peace in that sunshine. He ran for it, legs pumping desperately, breath scorching his throat. But he was losing ground, he knew. The unspeakable thing behind was gaining on him, closing the distance between them slowly but inexorably.

Someone moved in the golden light ahead. "Help!" he called. "Help me!"

The figures there paused. He felt them looking his direction. As always, however, they just looked. This once, he wished they would *do* something. He could not run much longer. He felt the cold of the thing behind, smelled its fetid, suffocating breath, felt its burning hatred.

"Help me!"

Claws closed on his shoulder. From them, bitter cold and white-hot heat spread through his body, simultaneously freezing and searing him. He screamed at their touch and fought the grip, but it pulled him, turning him to face it. And as the terror came into view....

He woke, thrashing wildly.

His wife caught at him. "David, it's all right." Kris wrapped her arms around him, restraining him, pulling his head against her breasts. "You're awake now. You're safe." Her tears splashed on his forehead.

He clung to her, crying, too, clutch-

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ing at the security of her, at her familiar scent and the loved feel of her bare skin.

"David, you can't go on like this," she whispered. "Please, please go back to Dr. Mayes."

Against her chest, he shook his head. "He didn't help before."

"Then take the sleeping pills he gave you. You don't have to tough it out. Or see another doctor, but get some kind of help ... not just for yourself, but for me, too. Don't you know what it does to me to have you waking up screaming night after night?"

Guilt stabbed him. "I'll think about it. Right now, just hang on to me. *Mi corazón; vida mía.*" He clung to her warmth and softness.

David leaned back in his chair and ran a tired hand through his hair. Why did investigation always seem to be ninety percent negative leads?

"Can't find where your man's from?" asked Bill Purviance, whose desk sat back-to-back with David's.

David shook his head. "He isn't missing from any of the towns directly around here."

"Well, if he's part of the rat pack you suspect, he's not likely to have anyone anxious enough about his whereabouts to report him missing."

True; however — "I've checked with informants here and in Saunders, and while there have been some criminal feuds involving Hispanics, the subjects are either still walking around or dead and accounted for." His query to NCIC, the FBI's National Criminal Information Center, asking about missing persons and wanted criminals of the dead man's description, had not been answered yet, nor the requests to the larger cities in Kansas and western Missouri.

"Jacobs doing the autopsy today?"

"Finally. With luck, we'll have word on fingerprints back from the KBI in a few days. How's your drug case coming?"

Purviance grimaced. "I'd never have believed a sixteen-year-old kid could be so tough and cagey. The other high school kids have accepted that rookie we borrowed from Topeka PD as a genuine transfer student, but the Stacey kid is only letting him in on the edge of the business. I'd try sweating the supplier's name out of Stacey, but I doubt I'd get anywhere. He knows we can't do much to a juvie like him, and if we arrest him, someone else will only take over dealing and we'll have to start all over again." Purviance sighed. "So, it's coming along, but slowly."

Anger swirled around David. The ragged pile of flesh and bone stirred impatiently in its cabinet space in the hospital pathology lab. David rubbed his temples. *Be still. I'm doing what I can.* The man had waited months to have his death discovered; he could wait a few more days for retribution.

But the anger persisted, nagging at him, demanding he do more than sit.

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Finally, sighing, he stood and headed for the door.

"Where are you going?" Lt. Christopher called after him.

David stopped. He wished they would stop baby-sitting him. But that attitude was unfair, he knew; since his incident, *everyone* had been required to keep the office informed where they were at all times while on duty. "Out to where we found the body," he said.

"I thought you covered that thoroughly day before yesterday."

"I thought so, too, but I have a feeling about it, like I've missed something."

You always have that feeling these days, the look in Christopher's eyes said, but he nodded. "Keep calling in your 10-20."

"Yes, sir."

Once out at the salvage yard, though, he had no idea what to do. He walked around the car body, then back to the rear fence. "What do you want me to do?" he asked aloud.

But of course when he asked for it, no response came, only the continued silent demand for reprisal against the murderer.

David leaned on the fence, fingers hooked through the wire, and stared between the trees at the river. The person or persons who brought the dead man here would not have wanted to walk very far from their vehicles; the farther the distance, the greater the chance of being seen. But that presented no great problem. Dozens of small paths and roads led down to the river's edge.

He climbed over the fence and made his way through the trees as they had the other day, down to the sandy river bank. Letting impulse guide him, he turned north, up the river. What he expected to find, he had no idea. As the heat became unbearable, he pulled off his coat and flung it over his shoulder.

Why are you so much more restless than other victims have been? he silently asked the dead man. *And why choose to bug me?*

As though in answer, his vision doubled. He continued to see the river normally, but at the same time, darkness and an altered perspective superimposed over it. He stopped walking, confused by the double orientation. The second vision seemed to be from higher up, he decided.

He turned to look at the bank sloping toward the woods. From somewhere along there? He made his way up the bank and continued along the edge of the woods.

Here, the voice in him said.

He stopped. The river ran murmuring below him, simultaneously in sun and moonlight. Terror and a terrible chill eddied around him. He stood at the edge of a track, two wheel ruts worn into the sandy soil with weeds growing up between. If this were the road the killers drove up, he had no hope of finding their tracks; hundreds of fishing and canoe-carrying vehicles

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must have been over it through the course of the summer. Still, David looked around, hoping his silent witness would have something helpful to offer.

Just off the side of the track he noticed a patch of grass looking just a shade taller and greener than that around it. David pulled out his pocket knife and opened it. Using the blade, he dug. The sandy soil worked easily ... and after a few minutes, the knife turned over a clod containing a flat piece of bone tangled in black hair.

He headed for the car to call in.

Rick Dlabal came out to help him. They photographed the site, then, sweating, dug out a circle about six feet across and sifted through the earth with a strainer. More pieces of bone fell loose, more clots of hair, and a scattering of lead pellets.

"It looks like skull to me," Dlabal said. He helped David carefully collect the bone and hair in a plastic evidence bag. "You sure have a track on this case."

Or it had on him. Had he really volunteered for the call the day the body was reported, David wondered, or had the dead man been reaching out for him even then?

He bit his lip. This was crazy, thinking a dead man was playing him like a puppet. Maybe he *should* go back to the shrink.

He sealed the bag and identified it, then drove in to the hospital to collect the clothes and pathology specimens to go to the KBI crime lab.

Dr. Jacobs was just finishing the autopsy. "Well, to no one's surprise, he died of a gunshot wound entering the back of the head, probably a shotgun. Age, early thirties, and about medium weight, judging by the lack of body fat."

That would not help narrow the hunt much, David thought with a sigh. The description must fit half the Hispanic-descendant males in the area, himself included. "How long has he been dead?"

"Call it four months."

That put it about April. It had been a bad month: this guy, the Chaffin girl, two OD's, and a day lost from David Amaro's life. "Okay. Get a written report to me as soon as possible." The faster he solved this, the quicker he could be rid of the dead man's presence.

The horror behind him gained faster than ever this night, despite the fact that the people at the end of the tunnel acted for the first time, calling encouragement to him. Because of it, he ran harder, straining toward the light, but the horror sank in its claws, and beyond the excrutiating cold and heat of them he heard the voice he had come to associate with the dead man. *No, you can't go. No peace until the betrayer is caught, the Cain, the Judas punished. He must not be allowed to escape.*

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This time, David woke without screaming. Kris slept curled against him, undisturbed. Sweat drenched him, though. He sat up, careful not to wake her, and in the darkness hugged his knees.

The dead man was part of the horror he ran from? Had he just joined it, in the way of dreams, or had he been in it all along, silently? The man had died about the time David lost a day from his life. Could there be a connection between the two events that accounted for the effect the dead man had on him?

Another more unpleasant thought occurred to him. Sensing the dead man's emotions could be explained as imagination or empathy, but ... how did he explain this vision of the river from the murder site? Could it be that he knew it not through the dead man's memory at all but had seen it just that way with his own eyes?

He had been tracking drug dealers, people whose powdered hell killed two kids with a third to come later, people who might try turning on his own son in another few years when Richard reached high school. David had been working the case hot with righteous wrath. Had he caught up with one of his quarry and lost control?

In the darkness, he crossed himself. Dear Mother of God, what *had* he done that missing day?

Ambivalence plagued his work on the case. On the one hand, the dead man drove him to make an identification and catch the killer. On the other, David feared it. He could not believe he would go off the deep end that way, no matter how he felt about a perpetrator, but according to Dr. Mayes, the amnesia was caused by some experience so traumatic that David's mind rejected the very memory of it and everything connected with and leading up to it. Nevertheless, despite his personal reluctance, he doggedly checked missing persons and wanted lists, requesting further details on possibles. Until the fingerprints, if any, arrived from the KBI, he had to depend on physical characteristics: description, dental charts, medical history. He eliminated the possibles one by one over the next four days ... subject A because he had had all four wisdom teeth removed while the dead man still kept his lower ones — *like me*, David thought — subject B because he had no history of broken bones while the dead man had suffered a fracture of the distal right fibula sometime in childhood and, more recently, fractures of the left second and third metacarpals.

Reading about the latter in the autopsy report, David rubbed his left hand, feeling the knots of callus on his own bones and thinking about the angry driver who shut the car door on his hand when he was a rookie. He wondered how the dead man got *his*.

"How are you doing?" Lt. Christopher asked.

David shook his head. "Negative so

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far. I wish the KBI would get those prints back to us."

"Well, if this isn't taking all your time, can you help Madieros with some burglaries? Put this on a back burner until a live lead comes in."

Lieutenants propose and sergeants dispose. David nodded and dropped by Joe Madieros's desk. "Would you like me to help check the stolen property list against the pawn shops?"

Madieros grinned. "Welcome, *compadre*. I'll flip you for it. Heads, you check the shops in town; tails, I do and you go to Saunders."

The coin came up heads.

David checked the two pawn shops downtown, first, then those on the west side of town, where Valley Boulevard ran out toward Saunders and Fort Flint.

"Hot day, sergeant," the clerk of Palmer's said.

David nodded, unfolding his list. "Let's see if you have any items matching these —"

A scream of brakes interrupted him. Both David and the clerk raced for the door. On Valley Boulevard outside, a driver leaned from the window of his car, swearing at a boy on a bicycle. Smirking, the boy reared the bike into a wheelie, then raced off up a side street.

"Crazy kids," the clerk said.

But envy mixed with irritation in David as he looked after the boy. "I never could learn to do a wheelie."

"They shouldn't be allowed to ride bikes on the highway. We've had two kids hit along here in the past year."

"I tried and tried," David said, "but all I accomplished was breaking my ankle." He had almost forgotten that. It had been the end of the right fibula.

And then the hair raised on the back of his neck. His dead man had the same kind of fracture in the same ankle, also sustained in childhood according to the autopsy report.

"We're lucky neither of them was killed," the clerk said.

Something with fetid breath breathed cold down David's neck. What was this, a body of not only his description but similar injuries and dental work? There were stories of people meeting doubles, but queasy knots tied in his gut at the thought of investigating the murder of *his* double ... a violent reminder of his own fragile mortality. Just how alike were they, he wondered.

He opened the door and headed for his car. He wanted to read the autopsy report again.

"Sergeant, did you want to go over that list? Sergeant?" the clerk called after him.

David gunned the car back up Valley Boulevard toward downtown.

He did not feel like reading the report at his desk, where everyone could see him. He carried it into one of the interview cubicles and locked the door behind him. As he read, he regretted the air conditioning. It only aggravated the internal cold burning through him. The lack of tonsils in the body

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meant nothing special; most people had had them removed, just as most people managed to avoid having appendectomies — David felt sure he shared both circumstances with millions of people — but matching the dead man's dental chart against what he remembered of his own teeth, he wondered, who ever heard of a double matching right down to the fillings?

Sitting in the interview room, his breath rasped in his throat, as though he were fleeing down the tunnel of his nightmare. He felt the horror behind gaining on him, breathing like thunder, claws of ice and fire reaching for him. His hands closed on the edge of the table, gripping until his knuckles went white. If the terror caught him by daylight, how could he wake up to avoid seeing it?

He started violently as the doorknob rattled.

"Amaro? Are you in there?"

Christopher's voice. David sighed. "Yes."

"Alone?"

In the dubious tone David read suspicion of what anyone could be doing by himself in an interview room. David bit his lip. "What do you want?"

"The KBI managed to bring up some prints on the inside of the skin of the fingers we sent them. The telex just came in."

That was a means to end a nightmare. "Hallelujah!" He quickly unlocked and opened the door. Here the doubling business stopped and, hopefully, here lay the key to identifying the dead man.

He took the telex sheet Christopher held out. "I'll send this right —" His voice stopped at a sudden constriction in his throat. Studying his own fingerprints as part of police training had taught him the pattern he carried, all ulnar loops except for a tented arch on his right index finger. From the telex, the dead man's fingerprints stared up at him, nine ulnar loops and a tented arch on the right index finger. David fled down the black tunnel, lead dragging at his feet. Fiery cold claws closed on his shoulder from behind and dug deep, turning him....

"Amaro!" Christopher said sharply. "Are you going faint?"

David rubbed his shoulder, surprised not to find it bleeding; he still felt the prick of claws in it. "I'll send this off to Washington right away." He hurried past the lieutenant, out of the detectives' room.

But instead of going to Communications, he fingerprinted himself and sat down with a magnifying glass. He could not miss the likeness. Shaking, he painstakingly counted ridges, praying for differences, but his eye found none. Point for point, the dead man's matched his: the shape of the loops, the branchings, the rods in the cores, the two ridges between core and delta on the index and middle fingers of the left hand.

Claws bit through his shoulder. Paralyzed by the pain, he could not

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fight as the horror turned him. In the blackness of the tunnel, he found himself looking down on the Flint River, the nightwind stirring his hair above the muffling gag in his mouth. Cords bit deep into his wrists and ankles. *I won't die,* his voice cried in his head. I won't rest, either, until you're punished. Then he was on his face in the grass and soil, and the night disappeared in excruciating noise and pain.

Convulsively, he crumpled the telex and fingerprint card and threw them across the room. No. Impossible! He was not the dead man! How could he be? He breathed; his heart beat; he bled when he nicked himself shaving.

Without being quite sure how he got there, he found himself in his car, heading up Commercial Street. His body drove while his mind raced panic-stricken inside his skull. He wanted to deny that the memory could be his, that the body could be his; and, yet, how else could he explain the fingerprints? And he had lost a day about the time the man died. Amnesia came from wanting to forget some trauma. What could he want to forget more than his own violent death? What trauma surpassed that? It explained the nightmare, and the daytime feeling of dread.

With something of surprise, he found himself calmly accepting the memory of death as his. He only wondered at his hatred of the killer — a killer whose identity he could not remember — being strong enough to do *this* ... bring him back in flesh so convincingly real that not even he himself had suspected the truth in four months. *Is it Descartes?* he thought sardonically. *I think I am; therefore, I am* ... the true existential man.

The car turned into the high school parking lot, almost of its own volition. David eyed the building without surprise. Of course he would come here; it was the last place he was known to be that missing day. Here he must find his own trail and track it to the man who killed him.

Try as he might, though, sitting in the courtyard of the closed building until the late afternoon turned to twilight, he could not remember coming here, could not recall talking to any of the students. The place gave him no idea where to go next.

Just north of the high school, separated from it by a sandstone wall, lay West Cemetery. David climbed the wall into it and walked among the headstones. A green, peaceful place, he thought, except one terrible April day.

Rage blazed in him thinking about Connie Chaffin. She had been a beautiful girl, the daughter of the past county attorney and a star on the girls' track team. She had dreamed of running in the Olympics. Only, one noon she had not come back from her usual run, and the next day a caretaker found her raped, strangled body in the gutted old bell tower in the middle of the cemetery.

David took a deep, steadying

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breath. Why was he thinking of Connie? She had been Marion Aubell's case, not his.

At the rear of the cemetery ran Bandit Creek. Deep in the ravine it had dug over the centuries, it cut through behind both high school and cemetery and on north through a residential section. David scooted and slid down the side of the ravine and hopped across the stream to follow the path beside it. The track team and local joggers had worn the path to a hard, even surface. Connie ran here, he remembered. She had probably been snatched somewhere along its length.

She was running one time and saw them. Someone had said that to him of Connie. Who? He strained to remember. Of course ... Kim Harris, one of Connie's girlfriends. Only, David had not been helping investigate Connie's death then. It was a week or so later, his missing Tuesday. He had been asking about drugs. How had Connie's name come up?

Walking north along the path, he tried to remember. Gradually, he became aware that he was slowing down. Each foot moved forward with increasing reluctance. Something in him did not want to continue. His heart hammered in his ears. With the trees up the sides of the ravine reaching out to block the sky, the scene reminded him of his nightmare tunnel, except that, here, he felt the horror ahead of him, not behind.

Then he remembered. *That* was why Connie dominated his thoughts. The Harris girl had told him that Brad Stacey dealt drugs — everyone in school knew that — but Connie had said she knew who supplied them. "She said she was running one time and saw them." The memory replayed clearly, as though it had never been lost.

"Saw who?"

"Brad and someone. She didn't say who the other one was."

"When did she tell you that?" he had asked.

"That morning — you know, the day she —" The girl had not been able to finish the sentence. "She never paid much attention to Brad because she didn't use drugs and she said people should be able to use or not use as they wanted. After Bill and Tina died, though, she was upset. She said that wasn't right and she was going to tell her father what she had seen and stop what Brad was doing."

At that point it had occurred to David that Connie's death was more than rape; it might well have been made to look like rape just to hide the real reason for killing her.

Connie ran down Bandit Creek ravine. So David had taken a walk along it, too, just as he was doing now, looking for sites where Connie could have seen the Stacey kid and his supplier. He had walked up it and ... and what? His memory stopped there.

Soon he passed beyond the boundary of the cemetery and entered the

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portion of the ravine running through the residential area. The trees along the sides thinned out, and the ravine itself widened to make a broad, grassy verge beside the path. Balconies and windows of the Westminster Apartment complex looked down from the eastern rim. Could Connie have seen something in one of the windows? Even as David looked up, a nude girl passed a balcony door. Or had Connie seen the Stacey boy in one of the yards of the houses along the western side? The yards were easily accessible from the ravine, as the apartments were not, steps leading up to many of them.

Steps. David's vision doubled, as it had beside the river. In memory, he saw someone move in a greenhouse reaching from the rim to the rear of one house. He climbed the stone steps behind it and tapped on the glass. In the present, he found the greenhouse empty, but his gut still tied in angry/frightened knots. Up there the horror had begun.

He did not climb the steps this time, but leaned against a tree near the bottom and let memory flow.

Answering his tap on the glass had been a man grey-haired with middle age but still trim and fit-looking, back straight and chin up. Military, David had guessed. Being this close to Fort Flint, Wataka had become a home and retirement town for officers.

"May I help you?" the man asked.

David had taken out his identification. "I hope so. You are...?"

"Major Charles Burris, U.S. Army, retired." He held out his hand. His grip fairly crushed David's hand.

Through the wall of the greenhouse, David saw a profusion of flowers in riotous colors. "Those are beautiful."

Burris beamed. "Thank you. Come in and take a closer look." He had led David down the row of tables. "They're Vietnamese varieties, grown from seeds and bulbs I brought back with me after the war." When David blinked in surprise, Burris smiled. "You find that strange behavior for a military man?"

"A little unusual, yes." But certainly preferable to what many soldiers had brought back from that purgatory. He moved down the long building almost to the door that opened, it appeared, into the garage. "They must take a lot of work."

"I'm out here for hours every day." Burris raised a brow. "May I ask what this about?"

"If you're in here, you must see people on the ravine path."

"Joggers, yes, all the time, especially mornings and evenings."

"Do you remember ever seeing Connie Chaffin?"

The major's face went grave. "That girl who was strangled last week?" He sighed. "Yes, I saw her often. What a terrible thing to happen. A Sergeant Aubell talked to me right after it happened, but I had to tell him I didn't see her that particular day. Do you have

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something new on her death?"

Did David detect unusually intense interest behind the question? He shrugged. "You know how these things go ... check and recheck everything, just in case something slipped by us the first time." He paused. "Have you ever seen a boy, tall, over six feet, very thin, white-blond hair? He would probably have been in street clothes, not running gear."

Burris had pursed his lips. "I don't remember everyone I've seen, but, offhand, I don't remember a boy like that."

But David had seen the major's pupils dilate during the description of the Stacey boy, and dilate again while replying. The major had lied, David swore by every cop instinct in him. The major definitely deserved to be checked out. He could easily have brought a drug dealership back from Nam along with his flower seeds. "Well, thank you."

"Do you think the boy had something to do with the girl's death?" Burris asked.

David gave him a blandly professional smile. "We're just making routine checks, major." He started back for the door by the steps, to leave.

Before he reached it, however, the door came open and a tall, thin, white-blond boy bounded through. "Major, that Harris bitch told —" He stopped short, seeing David. His pale blue eyes went wide.

Gotcha! David thought. He turned back toward Burris ... just in time to catch a flowerpot square in the face. His nose squashed under the impact and he went down in blood and pain. Before he could recover enough to reach for his gun, the other two were on top of him. Between them, they disarmed and tied him and, after emptying his pockets and stripping him of even his watch and wedding ring, carried him into the garage, where they folded him into the trunk of the major's car.

"Where are you taking him?" the Stacey kid had asked in a tone of mild curiosity.

"Not your concern. Here, put this fishing gear in the back seat, will you? I might as well combine business with pleasure. Now, what was it you were about to tell me?"

The major closed the trunk, and David could not hear the answer, but he guessed it, that the Stacey kid had learned of Kim Harris telling a cop what Connie said she knew. Faintly, he heard Burris say, "... that she forget both conversations, but without leaving any marks."

Leaning against the tree in the ravine beneath the major's greenhouse, David understood why no one had been able to track him past the high school. The Harris girl had been afraid to say what she told him.

So, now he had his day back. He knew the victim and the killer in the salvage yard case. Now what? He had no proof that the major had killed

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Connie Chaffin, and he could hardly expect the County Attorney to prosecute someone for the murder of David Amaro when said police officer had to all appearances been walking around in perfect health for four months after his supposed time of death. He might be able to nail Burris on drug charges, but that was not good enough. David wanted the major for murder, for his and Connie's and the three OD's, and for all the other misery he had caused with his powdered hell. More than that, David wanted the whole world to know the kind of scum the major was. He wanted him blackened, reviled, hated, and, most of all, dead. For that David had clung to Earth, and nothing less would satisfy him.

Of course, he could simply kill Burris, but if that hurt anyone, it would be David Amaro's wife and children, and the department. Not even vengeance was worth hurting his personal and professional families.

Then he smiled. Maybe there *was* a way to do it all, to destroy Major Charles Burris and still protect David Amaro's memory. It by-passed due process, but what the hell ... one might think of it as self-defense.

Humming, happier than he had felt in months, he mounted the steps into the back yard of the neighbor just south of Burris and rapped on the back door of the house. He showed his identification to the woman who answered. "May I please use your telephone?"

She led him to an extension in the kitchen. After looking up Burris in the phone book, he punched the Law Enforcement Center number. "Kate, this is David Amaro," he told the dispatcher who answered. "Pass this on." He kept his voice pitched low enough that the residents of the house could not hear. "Connie Chaffin was killed because she saw the Stacey kid's supplier. He's a retired army major who was in Nam and probably made his connection there. The name is Charles Burris. He may have killed the guy we found in the salvage yard as well as the Chaffin girl. I'm going around and ask the guy a few innocent questions just to get the feel of him. The address is 610 Franklin Drive."

He jiggled the button, then punched Burris's number. "Major, you don't know me, but I know all about you. Meet me in your greenhouse in five minutes if you don't want me passing on what I know to the police."

Then he thanked the woman and left, slipping across the back yard into Burris's and into the greenhouse.

In five minutes sharp the door from the garage opened. By the light of the ultraviolet lamps above a couple of tables, David saw Buriss come in.

"Hello, major." He stepped forward to where the light would catch his face.

No recognition showed in Burris's face. "Who the hell are you and what's this nonsense about telling the police something? Telling them what?"

Burris did not recognize him,

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David realized with shock, quickly followed by anger. He jerked his identification from his pocket and held it out to the major. "The name is David Amaro. Maybe you can forget a man whose head you've blown off, but I haven't forgotten you. I've come after you."

Now Burris remembered; David saw it in the major's eyes, but Burris did not fall apart. "I have no idea what you're raving about," he snapped. "I've never met a police officer named Amaro."

So David obligingly repeated for him, word by unforgettable word, event by event, what had happened in the greenhouse and on the river bank in April.

Listening, Burris's eyes went icy. "You'd have me believe you're a ghost? Ridiculous." His right hand, in his pocket until now, came out holding a .45. David saw it with fierce satisfaction. Burris said, "I think you'd better leave before I feel compelled to defend myself against a burglar."

"I won't be the one who dies tonight; I'm already dead. It's your turn." David lunged for Burris.

As he saw the gun muzzle flash fire, he thought: *You're only as real as you believe. The bullet can't hurt you.* It did not hurt, but as it tore through him, it kicked him backward and spun him around. Behind him, glass shattered as the bullet passed on through the greenhouse wall.

David did not fall, however, and with blood spurting from the wound in his chest, started toward Burris again. "You can't kill a ghost, major."

Burris tried. He fired repeatedly. David felt nothing. Amid breaking glass and spraying blood, he forged forward.

Burris paled. His eyes went wild and white. "Fall, damn you!" he whispered, and backed away, still firing.

Before the major could empty the clip completely, David forced him against the garage wall and reached for the gun. He could not pry it out of Burris's frantic hand, but he managed to shove the barrel upward so that it pointed back toward Burris himself. The next shot, by now fired in convulsive desperation, entered the major's throat and exploded upward out the top of his head.

As the major collapsed, David heard the whoop of an approaching siren. He sighed wearily. Good. He could leave everything else to the police.

It made a hell of a report to write. Answering a complaint of gunfire, Officer Deborah McGivern heard a story of a police officer who had used the complainant's phone and was seen in Major Charles Burris's greenhouse minutes later, being shot to death by the major. The only body in the greenhouse, however, was the major's, amid a scene that belonged in a slaughterhouse, with blood drying in splashes

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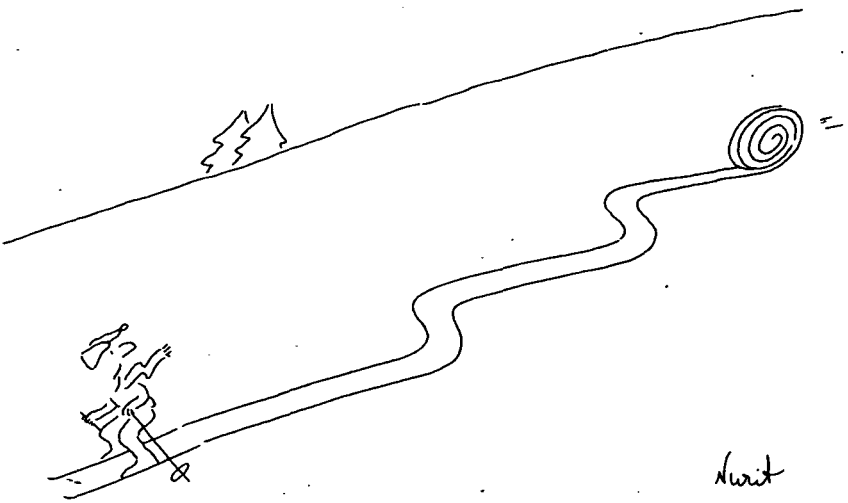
and streaks and pools everywhere. Except for a pile of bloody clothes, McGivern found no sign of Sergeant Amaro. The KBI lab later established that one of the blood types found, representing most of the blood, matched that of Amaro, and that bloody fingerprints on the edges of the tables were his. The gun, however, bore only Burris's prints.

"What do you think?" McGivern asked Lt. Christopher. "Was it a murder-suicide? Then what happened to Amaro? He couldn't have walked away after losing that much blood, could he?"

Christopher had no idea what to suggest, especially after what the secretaries had found on the office floor ... the crumpled telex with the prints of the salvage yard body and a fingerprint card which the secretaries swore bore Amaro's fingerprints; they had seen him making up the card. Comparison to Amaro's personnel file confirmed the prints on the card as his, but it was in comparing both sets to the telex that Christopher began to doubt his sanity.

He showed the three sets to Assistant Chief Bettenhausen. "What do you think about this? What should we do?"

Bettenhausen studied all three for a long time, then returned the personnel file to Christopher. "What we do is see that Amaro is declared Missing and Presumed Dead in the Line of Duty, so his family will get his pension. *This* we try *not* to think about. We forget it." And he carefully tore the card and telex into confetti.



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Edward Hughes wrote "A Born Charmer," August 1981. This new story is also about a post-holocaust Wales and a young man, Dafydd, whose uncanny powers breed nothing but trouble.

The Price of Livery

BY

EDWARD P. HUGHES

If wishes were horses,
beggars would ride.
— *Old Nursery Rhyme.*

Dafydd Madoc Llewelyn had been sentinel for twelve months when his mother got a cough and began spitting blood. Without penicillin, and the nearest *meddyg* an hour's journey away in Pwllheli, within two weeks she was dead from lobar pneumonia. At the funeral the elders all agreed that, in the old days, she could have been saved. And they routinely cursed charmers and their works.

When they had gone, the *tad* said, "Things will have to change now, boys. I am too old to be seeking another woman to take the *mam's* place — even supposing there might be one of my acquaintance daft enough to consider looking after three grown men." He turned a paternal eye on Dafydd's elder brother. "Owain, do you not feel it is time you was choosing a wife for yourself?"

Owain Llewelyn wriggled uneasily in his chair. Dafydd mentally reviewed the available candidates and repressed a shudder. Owain loosened the tie he had worn for the funeral. "Couldn't we let it bide a while?" he pleaded. "The *mam* is scarcely—"

Arfon Llewelyn's brows lowered ominously. "'Tis naught to do with your *mam*. I am thinking of tomorrow's breakfast — and the meals to follow. Myfanwy Thomas cannot carry on doing for us: There is her own home to care for. But—" He shrugged. "—if you are prepared to take over the housework, I am prepared to postpone our discussion for as long as you wish."

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Owain's mouth opened wordlessly. Dafydd smirked. Eventually Owain got his breath. "What time have I for making meals? There is the cows to milk, the pigs to feed, the—"

Arfon Llewelyn raised a monitory palm. "Do not lecture me, son. I have already faced the facts, and stated my conclusions."

Owain put down his head and shook it, like a beast just poleaxed. "*Tad* — you don't just go out and *grab* a wife. Women have their own views about marriage. They have to be courted." He stared about agitatedly, his gaze alighting on his brother. "Dafydd will tell you. He knows."

Arfon Llewelyn transferred his gaze to his younger son. "So what does our expert say?"

Dafydd stammered, disconcerted at becoming the focus of parental interest. "Ow — Owain is talking about Ceinwen Thomas." He forced a placatory smile. "But you know we've always been friends. There is nothing serious between us."

His father's lips twitched. To Dafydd's surprise, he refrained from the usual comments on what he had long called Dafydd's passion. He scratched his jaw, eyes pensive. "I thought you was a bit young to be planning matrimony. Still, there is an idea. I will speak to Tecwin Thomas tomorrow. Perhaps Ceinwen would be willing to come and cook for us until Owain finds a lass he is prepared to let into his bed."

Dafydd sniffed in wordless comment. If they waited for brother Owain to find a wife, Ceinwen Thomas would be a long time in the Llewelyn kitchen. He heard Owain's gasp of relief.

Owain said eagerly, "If Ceinwen comes, I will do all the outside jobs the *mam* used to do."

"That you will not!" The *tad's* horny finger prodded Dafydd's chest. "You, my lad, will be coming down from that blotty mountain and start giving a hand around the house."

Dafydd retreated from his father's finger, scowling. "You mean I am no longer sentinel?" His father's decision was unfair. Dafydd had grown proud of the role which required him to keep an eye on the Bangor road in case Raiders should decide Cwm Goch was worth a visit. Had he not already saved the village from one attack? Besides — the job kept him out of Ceinwen's way, while providing time for private fantasies.

His father interrupted his ruminations. "I mean, son, that you will do some housework *before* you go on duty, some housework *after* you come off duty, and—" Was that a twinkle in the *tad's* eye? "—if I can figure out the way of it, some housework while you are *on* duty!"

And so, Ceinwen Thomas, daughter of Tecwin and Myfanwy Thomas, the Llewelyn's nearest neighbours, came to rule temporarily the kitchen at Careg Ddu.

Little had passed between her and

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Dafydd regarding their part in the escape of an alleged charmer from the clutches of the Village Council since it had happened just over a year ago. Not that Dafydd avoided Ceinwen: he merely took care to be in the company of others whenever she was around, thus hoping to dodge any discussion of Long John Ledger's escape and all matters pertaining thereto. For, the less that particular event was discussed, the safer was his secret. And the integrity of Dafydd's secret had become his prime concern ever since he had been obliged to allow Ceinwen to share it.

The following morning, Owain and the *tad* gone to work, Dafydd dried crockery for a soapy-armed Ceinwen and prepared for the inquisition.

"It is a long time since we had a minute together in private," she began sweetly, stacking pots faster than he could dry.

Dafydd juggled with a plate, tempted to let it slip in the hope of diverting the undivertible. "Not my fault," he lied.

"I was just thinking about that conjurer fellow we saved from being blinded by old Emrys," she continued smoothly. "Remember?"

Dafydd felt like a moth being scientifically pinned to a board. "Oh, aye — John Ledger, you mean."

"They thought he was a charmer. But it was you was the charmer, wasn't it? You said so, didn't you?"

"Did I? I don't remember."

Her eyes widened, like an owl's in the dark. "Dai Llewelyn! You *showed* me! You charmed a shotgun shell into your hand, right in front of me."

Panic expanded in his chest. His heart thumped. By hook or by crook, this breach in his defenses had to be repaired! No way did he intend to spend the rest of his days at the mercy of Ceinwen Thomas' discretion.

"It was a conjuring trick," he stammered. "Long John was the charmer. That is how he got away."

She pouted. "I don't believe you. If it was a conjuring trick, that is how he got away."

"I can't do it now. I forget. It is a long time ago."

She grimaced seductively. "Dafydd — I won't tell on you being a charmer — ever. I haven't, have I?"

That was true. She had not given him away. Perhaps he should trust her. But....

"Ceinwen — I can't!"

She dried plump arms on the free end of the towel he held. "If you show me — I'll let you *touch* me."

He blushed. In all their years of friendship, he had never done more than put his arms around her and kiss her.

"There is only you and me here," she urged. "No one will know. Just do it once, and then—"

Eyes on her rounded hips, brain awhirl with the images invoked by her invitation, Dafydd extended his arm, palm upwards ... and charmed.

Nothing happened.

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He stared at his empty hand, shocked. "I — I can't do it!"

She removed the towel from his other hand and threw it over the remaining pots. "Yes, you can! I saw you do it."

Sweat beaded his brow. He stood as though petrified, an obstinately empty hand held out. "Ceiny — I can't think straight!"

She laughed. Her arm encircled his waist. "Have I put you off?" She kissed him. "Silly boy! Never mind — you can have a quick feel, and show me some other time."

Dafydd mounted Moelfre's slope wondering what had happened to his long-enjoyed knack. Shotgun shells had been an easy charm. *Duw* — he had been able to do them almost without thinking. But now he couldn't even produce one!

At the craggy outcrop from which he could see the Bangor road he squatted down. The sheep were scattered over the hillside. One or two began to move towards him. He pulled a hand from his pocket, thinking of his previous misgivings. Charmers were persecuted, but, given the choice, he would have preferred to retain the ability.

He extended a hand before him, scarcely trying.

A shotgun shell popped into existence in his palm.

"Well now," said a voice. "There's a clever trick."

"Matty!" Dafydd raised his eyes, guiltily clutching the shell in his fist. Matty Price, his fellow sentinel, appeared from behind a clump of gorse further up the hill.

"I — I didn't see you," Dafydd stammered.

Matty, veteran of seventy summers on the Lleyn, slipped easily down the slope towards him. "But I saw you, boyo." He swung his binoculars case casually. "Didn't need no glasses, either. You was late again this morning. I come up to see if you was on your way."

"The *tad* says I have to help Ceinwen Thomas with the housework before I come out," Dafydd explained. "I will be late every day until Owain gets himself a wife."

Matty nodded wisely. "No matter, son. Reckon I can manage without you easy enough. Twelve month ago I *had* to."

"Now, Matty — I didn't ask for the job. The Council decided I was to be sentinel."

"True. True." Matty nodded again. "Mind you, I don't suppose they knew they was setting a thief to catch a thief."

Dafydd felt the color drain from his face. "What do you mean?"

The old sentinel twirled his binoculars case. "In my book, charmers is no better than Raiders."

So, the old bastard had seen him charm! Dafydd cursed his luck. Wouldn't work when you wanted it, worked when it shouldn't. Now the

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old sod would be running straight to the Council, unless — ? He said, "What do you want?"

Matty Price leered at Dafydd's clenched fist. "A pocketful of two-two shells to fit my little sporting gun will do for a start. Lot of rabbits learned to avoid my snares lately. They won't find it so easy to dodge a slug."

"You start firing that two-two, and you'll have the Council on you," Dafydd warned. "Gun shots are supposed to mean 'Raiders sighted'."

Matty shook his head, grinning malevolently. "Let me worry about the Council, boyo."

Dafydd hid his dismay. Give in once, and you were trapped into giving in always. He didn't fancy being tame charmer to Matty Price. He said, "And if I won't?"

Matty laughed harshly. "Don't be daft, son. Think of that charmer that didn't get away."

Dafydd kicked blindly at a clump of heather. The fellow had been beheaded by King Rhys' soldiers. He could just remember it. And Long John Ledger, who *had* escaped, would have been blinded to avoid execution. Neither alternative appealed to Dafydd. If he ignored Matty's threat and allowed Matty to denounce him, it might not be so easy to bamboozle Emrys and his archers again. And, even if he escaped the penalty for charming, there was no way he could stay in Cwm Goch.

"Hold out your hands," he ordered.

Matty whistled softly at the heap of .220 ammunition which appeared. He stuffed the shells into his pocket, then scrabbled in the grass for those he had dropped. "*Duw*, boyo — you really can do it!" He gazed at Dafydd, half in fear, half in envy. "It's just like them tales where the feller catches a fairy and gets three wishes to let him go."

Dafydd said, "I will give you three wishes."

Matty scrambled to his feet, drawing back. "No fear, boyo. You're no fairy. You are a blotty charmer what has fell nicely into my hands. And, by damn — so long as you behave yourself, I will let you go on charming me two-two ammunition for a good while yet!"

He waved a jaunty salute, then slipped off downhill. Dafydd cursed him fluently. To be trapped by that old schemer, of all people! The man who hated him because he had got his job.

Over the pots, Ceinwen said, "Why so glum, lad? Can you still not do it? Must I tempt you again?"

He pulled a wry face. "Don't joke about it." He told her about Matty Price.

"The old villain!" She frowned at her reflection in the mirror above the sink. "Fancy him getting you going when I couldn't!" She gripped Dafydd's arm, her face showing concern. "He isn't going to denounce you to the Council?"

Dafydd pushed her hand away. Ceinwen the Friend was tolerable.

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Ceinwen the Possessive was a recipe for bachelors. He said, "Matty has his knife in me because I got his job. He might give me away out of spite."

She turned back to the sink, clattering plates. "He has his knife in the Council, too — didn't they give you the job? He won't go flying to them like Blodwen Hughes did when she found the *Sais'* gun. Besides, Matty is still sentinel as well as you."

Dafydd nodded. "But he does not like sharing the job with anyone else."

"Then he is a foolish old man. What else can he expect at his age? Did he say he would go to the Council?"

Dafydd shook his head. "Not in so many words. I think he was a bit scared of annoying me too much. He said, if I behaved myself he would let me go on charming for him."

"The wicked old scoundrel! Never mind—" Ceinwen shrugged. "A few shells now and again won't be difficult." She cocked her head to one side. "Unless he confuses you, too?"

Dafydd flushed. "You shouldn't joke about it. What if I start charming for him regular? Sooner or later, someone is going to find out." He waved a breakfast mug wildly. "He says let him worry about the Council — but it's my head he is risking!"

She crouched to stack dishes in the dresser. "Then you must do something about it."

Glumly he passed pots to her. "Like what?"

She wrinkled her brow in thought. "Like something to scare him off for good."

"What would that be?"

She squatted back on her haunches. "Dai, my love, you are the charmer. You know best what you can do. Just think about it. And, next time that old fool comes bothering you, scare the pants off him!"

Matty Price climbed warily up the seaward slope of Moelfre, making for the rocks which Dafydd used as a vantage point. Dafydd watched his approach. Matty halted several yards from the rocks, as if prepared to flee at any evidence of hostility.

Dafydd resisted the urge to call 'Boo!' and waited for Matty to come nearer.

"Hi, young feller!" Matty waved. "How about a few more of them shells?"

"I want a word with you first," Dafydd countered.

The old man inched closer. Still out of reach, he called, "What's the trouble?"

"No trouble, Matty. I just want to find out where we stand. Have you been to the Council?"

"Them fools!" Matty spat in contempt.

"Then why should I do you more shells?"

"Because, if you don't, I shall tell 'em what you are."

"Even though you think they are fools?"

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The old man screwed up his face in concentration. "I don't get your point, boy. How am I going to get shells out of you, if I don't threaten to split to the Council?"

"Well — if they find out that I can charm, they will make sure I never charm again."

The old man leered wickedly. "Ah — but you won't let me go that far, will you?"

Dafydd sighed. Ceinwen was right. The fellow was an old fool. He said, "Look, Matty — I want to show you something." He pointed uphill, towards a stone gable which had reared an inverted vee against the skyline since the fire which had long ago destroyed the cottage of which it had been part.

"What? Where?" The old man screwed up his eyes.

"The old Pugh cottage — watch!"

Dafydd had previously removed vital blocks from the gable's foundations to ensure an impressive demonstration. He said, "I'm going to put a weight up there. See what happens!" He charmed. A limestone block weighing probably half a ton appeared atop the vee's apex. The gable settled, squealing its protest. Then it began to buckle. Separate stones tumbled, while, magically, the wall remained upright. Then, suddenly, it collapsed in a plume of dust.

Matty turned scowling to Dafydd. "That's a bloody daft trick! I used to watch the Tan y Graig bend from that wall."

"Matty," said Dafydd, slowly and clearly, "that could have been the gable of your own cottage if you don't leave me alone — or if you go blabbing to the Council about me."

Matty's small, piggy eyes flicked furtively from side to side. "You threatening me, boyo?"

"No more than you are threatening me."

"You wouldn't dare. If I was in my bed, it would be murder."

"Then don't provoke me, and I won't do it."

Matty Price stood indecisively, eyes flicking to and fro. Then his mouth stretched in a gap-toothed smile. He held out a hand. "Do us a couple more handfuls of them shells, and we'll say no more about it."

Dafydd sighed. "What happened to the last lot I gave you?"

Matty stepped closer, confident now. "Shot 'em off at blotty rabbits, didn't I?"

"I didn't hear no shots."

Matty grinned. He laid a conspiratorial finger along his mottled nose. "Told you not to worry. I went round the other side of Eifl. You can't hear shots from there."

Dafydd cocked an eye at the peaks which loomed across the valley. The farther side of Yr Eifl was a fair hike for an old man. He asked, "Get any rabbits?"

"Been selling 'em in the village, haven't I? Got myself a bit of credit laid up for winter with the 'Judicator."

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Dafydd passed him a handful of charmed ammunition. If the old villain was using the shells to provide purchasing power for the winter, they were at least being put to good use. "Be careful where you shoot them off, and don't tell no one where you got them!"

Matty spat again. "Don't worry, boyo. I know when I'm on a good thing. I'm not going to cock it up like the feller that got three wishes. What about a cup of gin, while we're at it?"

Dafydd shook his head, perversely pleased. "I can't do eats or drinks. Nothing that grows. Good job for you I can't — I might turn you into a bloody pumpkin!"

He leaned on a yard brush, watching Ceinwen Thomas milk a Llewelyn cow. "I am worried about Matty Price," he told her. "I have threatened him, and the old fool just laughs at me. He wanted gin today. If he gets hold of some of that and starts babbling, I could be in trouble."

She said, "What did you give him, then?"

"More shells for his rifle."

She looked startled. "What has he done with the others?"

"Says he used 'em up shooting rabbits back of Eifl."

She shook a lock of hair from her eyes. "I don't believe him. I bet he is selling them."

Dafydd shook his head. "He fetched rabbits to the village."

"Why go so far for them? There's plenty on Moelfre."

"Gunshots up there are supposed to be a Raiders warning."

The hiss of milk into pail ceased. "No one would mistake a two-two for your twelvebore."

He shrugged. "I'd sooner not chance it. I don't want folk wondering where he gets his ammo from."

She carried the bucket to the coolroom, lifted it onto the cold slab. "If Matty Price is shooting rabbits round the back of Yr Eifl, there will be a reason for it that he doesn't want us to know." She draped a towel over the bucket. "Matty brought his gun to Idris the other day. Maybe Gethyn heard something."

"Is Gethyn working with Idris, then?" Dafydd felt a twinge of envy. Idris Evans, the Cwm Goch blacksmith, spent as much time repairing guns, tools, bicycles and the like, as he did shoeing horses. His glowing forge had been a magnet for Cwm Goch schoolchildren ever since Gronwy Jones had started her classroom across the street.

"Gethyn is selling scrap metal to Idris. He has found a dump of it in the old Eifl quarry."

Dafydd propped the brush against the coolroom wall. Gethyn Thomas was always the lucky one. Muscled like a plough horse, picked to play halfback on the village team; he was envied by every lad in the village. Dafydd said, "I will have a word with him myself."

Ceinwen untied the cow and sent

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her packing with a slap on the rump. "You will leave our Gethyn to me: I wouldn't trust you not to put your foot in it, asking about Matty Price's gun."

He followed her back to the house. She squirmed into her coat. "You had better be off, hadn't you? I have my own work to do now."

He said, "Okay — so I'm stupid. I've still got to look after myself. Why can't folk just leave me alone? I never harmed no one by charming. I won't even charm if I can avoid it, because some people would get upset if they found out. But that old idiot is making me do it by threatening to go to the Council."

She gave him a peck on the nose. "You haven't shown *me* yet. You got a feel for nothing, my lad."

He tried to grab her, but she pushed him away. He pleaded, "What is it you want to see?"

She laughed. "Your back, for a start. Here's your satchel, your gun, and your crook. Time you were gone."

He picked up his equipment. "But why won't people leave charmers alone? What real harm is there in it?"

She knotted a scarf under her chin, grimacing. "My *tad* would tell you, lad. Your own *mam* could be alive today if charmers hadn't buggered everything up with their clever tricks. The world would be an easier place today but for them. You just can't help being a public menace. And that's why we don't trust you!"

Dafydd sat musing on the rock which commanded a view of the Bangor road. Ceinwen's words still rang in his ears. Were charmers to be always burdened with the guilt of those who helped to destroy the pre-bomb world? Was every village run by men like Emrys Jones, ready to put your eyes out for your own good? Or with men like Ceinwen's father, who would shoot you like a rabid dog? Or like Matty Price, only interested in what he could get out of you?

He heard heavy breathing and muttered imprecations. A lumpy figure wearing headscarf, sheepskin coat and tight jeans, scrambled up the slope behind him, and flopped down at his feet.

She said between gasps, "Our Gethyn is going for more scrap. I told him you would give him a hand. You'd better push off." She craned her neck. "That's him, down there."

Dafydd watched the figure with the cart, small on the road below. Yr Eifl quarry was six miles away, and rough going once you left the main road. "Why should I help him?" he protested.

She shook her head in reproof. "Dafydd Llewelyn — didn't you tell me Matty Price went shooting back of Yr Eifl? Wouldn't it be nice to find out why he goes there?"

He frowned. "If you think it might be helpful...."

She sighed. "Matty is blackmailing you for shells. He says he shoots 'em off miles from anywhere. Wouldn't it be useful to know why? Maybe you could blackmail him back! Gethyn says that Matty brought his gun to

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Idris a couple of days ago to have the backsight filed down. Gethyn thinks Matty has been trying to fasten something to the barrel, and the backsight was in the way."

He stared at her, puzzled. "What would Matty want to fasten to his gun?"

"You figure it out, boyo."

He chewed his lip in thought. "If I went with your brother I would see where his scrap dump is. Would he mind me finding out?"

"I told him you already knew. I said you promised me you'd keep quiet about it."

Dafydd wavered. If she could lie to her brother....

She misread his indecision. "You can still watch the Bangor road from the quarry. If one of your sheep strayed that way, wouldn't you go after it?"

He shook his head. "I'd have to tell the *tad*. We would need the dogs."

"Why drag your poor *tad* out?"

"The dogs are his. They won't go without him. He had promised to get me one when we can afford it."

She stood up, mouth compressed into a tight line. "Dafydd Llewelyn — I get proper annoyed with you. I fix you up with a fine excuse to poke around the back of Yr Eifl while Matty Price might be there — and you start jabbering about dogs! You don't need dogs! There are no lost sheep there! You just have to walk there with our Gethyn, and see if you can find out what Matty is getting up to. If that is too difficult, I give you up!"

She turned away, lips quivering, and started down hill, trying to slide with dignity down Moelfre's slopes.

"Ceiny—!" He let her go. Sometimes women baffled him. Why was she so keen on getting him to spy on Matty? What if the old idiot did go miles to pot rabbits?

"Oh damn!" Dafydd kicked an inoffensive clump of heather, shouldered satchel, gun and staff, and dropped down towards brother Gethyn on the road below.

Gethyn said, "How long have you known about my scrap dump?"

Dafydd considered quickly. What else had Ceinwen told her brother? Anything she might have neglected to mention on Moelfre? He shrugged. "No more than a month or two. I chased a sheep out that way, one day."

Gethyn flicked him a speculative glance. "That dump is all mine, you know?"

Dafydd heaved satchel, crook and gun onto the cart alongside Gethyn's sledge hammer and coil of rope. "Don't worry, boyo. Your secret is safe with me."

"Just warning you, like."

At the fork they went left, through the deserted village, and took the road that ran over the shoulder of Yr Eifl. Even higher above loomed the ruins of Tre'r Ceiri where stoneage Welshmen had once dwelt, where a youthful Dafydd Llewelyn had assaulted and

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defended castles of fantasy. Below, on their right, the roofs of the old wool factory showed through the trees.

Gethyn said, "Emrys Jones is thinking of starting that place up again. Reckons as how there could be a market for our yarn now you can't get machine-knit stuff no more."

"So long as no one else gets the same idea," commented Dafydd drily.

Gethyn laughed. "Silly bugger — I mean with people who don't have sheep of their own."

Dafydd blinked in astonishment. Were there such folk?

They rounded the shoulder of the hill and came in sight of the sea again. Spread below them were the roofs of Trefan village, with its *two* chapels, its one-time Post and Telegraph Office which now functioned as a distillery, and beyond the houses, the pier and the lifeboat station.

"Them's a greedy lot," Gethyn explained. "I come this way to avoid them." Them, Dafydd knew, also boasted a rugby team which regularly beat the Cwm Goch side. "I would not trust them," Gethyn continued. "If they saw me pushing a load of scrap, some bugger would scratch around until they found my dump, and then they'd steal the lot."

The road petered out where a rusted railway line crossed it to dip towards the pier. Ahead lay the massive scar of the quarry. Gethyn grabbed his rope and hammer. "We'll leave the cart here," he told Dafydd. "I've got one of the trams working. We can bring the stuff down by rail."

"I'll take my things, too." Dafydd shouldered his equipment. Guns, particularly, were too valuable to leave unattended in carts.

Beyond the rusty rails, the road became a track leading to a weed-grown quarry floor. The old working face to their left hid Eifl's peaks. On their right the shelf terminated in a sheer drop, beneath which rose the lower face. A strong updraught stirred Gethyn's hair as he approached the brink.

He lashed one end of his rope around a large block. "I'm going over. Keep an eye out."

Dafydd shivered. The unguarded edge conjured up memories of escapades in which walking the brink had been a test of youthful nerve and courage. Dafydd had never been anxious to demonstrate his valor. And, even now, that anchor rock was too near the rim for comfort. Why hadn't Gethyn taken the shore route? The track which, in pre-bomb times, people had used to dump worn-out washing machines, useless fridges, broken bedsteads, and other sources of scarce metal. Bloody nuisance him wanting to avoid passing through Trefan.

Gethyn lowered himself onto the face, hammer in his belt. "Pull up when I shout," he instructed. "And don't let the rope chafe — it don't belong to me."

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Dafydd swallowed. He would have to go near that edge and haul up the rope burdened with scrap. *Duw* — he should have stayed on Moelfre, no matter what Ceinwen thought about it!

He squatted and opened the satchel to see what she had put on his sandwiches. A wild pigeon flapped suddenly from behind a clump of weeds, soaring high on the wind from the edge. Forgetting his lunch, Dafydd got to his feet, cocked the twelvebore, and waited. Pigeon shooting was rare sport. And Gethyn Thomas pounding scrap into portable sections down below wouldn't know he was supposed to have only enough shells for a Raiders warning.

Before another bird could appear, a figure stirred behind a heap of rubble several yards away. A knitted cap and wizened face rose into view. Matty Price flourished a bottle. "That you, young Llewelyn? You spying on old Matthew?"

Dafydd waved back half-heartedly. He hadn't expected to almost trip over the old villain. "Hullo, Matty."

The old man got up. He dusted grit from his britches, then retrieved a small-bore rifle from behind the rubble. Dafydd saw the telescope mounted on the barrel. So *that* was what Matty had been trying to fix to his gun! But why a telescope? That little two-two wouldn't shoot no farther than a fellow could spit. What use was a telescope? Unless Matty's eyes were worse than he ever let on?

Matty hiccupped. "I said — was you spying on me, boy?"

The old fool was drunk as a newt. Dafydd called. "It is okay, Matty. I am just waiting for...." He paused. If the old rogue learned that Gethyn was working on the shelf below, the Thomas scrap dump would soon cease to be a secret. Then, like frost on a May morning, it would probably disappear into thin air — to Matty Price's benefit. Would Gethyn have the sense to keep quiet and stay out of sight until he got rid of the old fool?

Matty swayed. "Now you can guess what happened to them shells. I traded 'em in at Trefan distillery for something better. Got a few rabbits at Trefan market, too, to prove I'd been hunting. What do you say to that?"

So that was what the old idiot was up to! Couldn't see good enough to shoot straight no more. So he swapped shells for booze and bought dead rabbits as an alibi! No wonder he tried to hide his fraud behind Yr Eifl.

Matty threw back his head and drank. He tossed away the empty bottle, leering at Dafydd. "What about a few more of them shells, boyo?"

Dafydd went cold. The Thomas hoard became suddenly unimportant. He listened vainly for the clang of Gethyn's hammer. No doubt, brother Gethyn had his ear well cocked down below. And if he heard that Dafydd Llewelyn was producing two-two shells on demand for Matty Price, he would be off to the Council like a shot.

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"You listening, Dai?" Matty raised the gun, put an eye to the telescope, and aimed at Dafydd. Dafydd stood perfectly still.

"Better than trying to pot blotty rabbits what you can't see," Matty mumbled.

Controlling the tremor in his voice, Dafydd said, "Put that gun down before you hurt somebody."

Vacant-eyed, Matty let the gun barrel drop. "Wouldn't harm you, Dai boy." He showed his gapped teeth in a grin, then waved the gun threateningly. "Unless you was to refuse to—"

Dafydd's brain cartwheeled. Gethyn Thomas was surely eavesdropping on the shelf below. If Matty Price mentioned charming, Dafydd Madoc Llewelyn was either dead, mutilated, or banished from Cwm Goch. The old man's mouth was shaping the fatal word. Dafydd could see it coming. His finger tightened on the twelvebore's trigger....

The gun boomed. The lightweight .22 spun out of Matty's grip. The old man shrieked and dropped to the ground.

Dafydd hurtled towards him. Matty lay groaning, one bloody hand flung out. Dafydd examined the wounds. Several pellets had struck the back of Matty's hand, none penetrating deeply; possibly because they had ricocheted off the gun barrel or the telescope. Both gun and scope were ruined. He fumbled in his satchel for the towel in which Ceinwen wrapped his sandwiches.

"Dai, boy? You all right?" Gethyn's head appeared over the rim of the shelf. "What happened?"

Dafydd lifted the inert Matty's towel-swathed limb. "He was waving his gun about, threatening me. I shot it out of his hand."

Gethyn scrambled onto the shelf. "Christ! That was dangerous. You might have killed him."

"The old fool is drunk. He might have killed me."

Gethyn sniffed at Matty's lips. "The Council is not going to like this."

Shocked, Dafydd said, "Are you going to tell them?"

"I have to." Gethyn scowled down at the groaning Matty. "He is still sentinel, is he not? Council won't tolerate no drunk sentinels."

"Oh — I thought you meant about me shooting him."

Gethyn grinned. "I was listening. I reckon it was self-defense, all right. Though they'll probably have to know about that, too."

Duw! The last thing he wanted was an inquest on Matty's drunken exploits. Or queries about a wounded hand. He had too much to hide.

"Look, Gethyn," he said. "Let's get the old fool home, and say no more. The hand is nothing. I will get the pellets out and clean it up. It will soon mend. I don't want to be the cause of him losing his job as sentinel."

"But the fellow's drunk!"

"I'll see he doesn't get drunk again."

"How can you promise that?"

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"Just leave it to me. We talk together a lot, up on Moelfre. I'll make sure he knows what will happen if he gets drunk again. Give him a chance, man."

Gethyn Thomas wavered. "I am not sure I should—"

"Ah — do us a favor," Dafydd pleaded. "I am keeping your scrap dump secret for you, aren't I? You say nothing to the Council about Matty for me."

Gethyn shrugged. "Okay, boyo. On your head be it if he lets you down, though. I did not know Matty meant so much to you. Give us a hand up with my stuff, then. We'll put the old fool on the cart and get him home."

The Price cottage stood a few yards back from the main road. Dafydd got the now sentient Matty off the cart and propped him on the grass. He retrieved his equipment, watched Gethyn set off toward Cwm Goch, then got an arm around Matty's waist.

The one-room hovel was littered and dirty. Dafydd helped Matty towards the unmade bed. Matty flopped sideways, cradling his wounded hand. "I heard what you said to Gethyn Thomas about not reporting me to the Council for being drunk."

"Shut up," Dafydd ordered. "We'll talk about it when you are feeling better."

"I just wanted to say ta for what you done. I always reckoned you was after my job."

"That's okay, then," Dafydd said soothingly. "Let's forget you ever thought that. I'll get some clean rag, and we'll put a fresh bandage on that hand for you."

The old man raised his arm, Ceinwen's towel was now grimy and blood-stained. Faded eyes blinked furiously. "Won't make no difference if you do. That shot smashed my gun and telescope."

Dafydd unwrapped the wounded hand. The bleeding had stopped. He counted seven pellets under the skin. He said, "You can always get another gun."

Matty Price screwed up his face. "Not worrying about the gun. It's the telescope." His voice faltered. "Damnit, boy, you must have guessed by now. I cannot see a blame thing without it."

Dafydd said, "Don't move. I'm going for water. Keep your hand up."

He took the cleanest bowl from the sink, then went out to the pump. So that was what was worrying the old man — well, he didn't have to shoot Raiders — only keep watch for them.

When he re-entered the cottage, Matty had turned face to the wall, head in the crook of his arm, wounded hand in the air. Dafydd put down the bowl by the bed. He tore a strip from the cleanest shirt on the line across the room. He said loudly, "What's wrong with using your binoculars instead?"

Matty's voice was muffled by his arm. "Don't have no blotty binoculars, do I? That there case is empty. I kept the telescope in it when I was up on Moelfre. Think an old fool like me

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would be rich enough to own field glasses *and* a telescope?"

Dafydd sat down on the edge of the bed. So his snap shot had stolen away Matty's ability to act as sentinel. He sponged the hand clean, noting the blue pocks where the pellets were buried.

"Got to get them pellets out, Matty. I'll have to hurt you."

Matty closed his eyes. "Go ahead, son. Bit of prodding won't make no difference now."

Dafydd got out his claspknife. He opened the large blade, and stared indecisively about the room. There was no fire where he might sterilize it. He carried no matches. Would a rinse under the pump be enough? Recently the blade had gutted rabbits, chopped bait, removed flints from sheep feet. He didn't want to give Matty the blood poisoning.

Dafydd sighed. It looked as though another well-guarded secret would have to go. He charmed. The metal slugs beneath the blue pocks disappeared. He began to dress the hand.

Matty Price turned his head. "What happened? You didn't do no prodding."

Dafydd said, "Stop worrying, Matty." He knotted the bandage, and studied his handiwork. There was no point now in stopping at the removal of a few pellets. If Matty was not an enemy, he must be treated as a friend. Dafydd recalled diagrams and pictures from the *mam's* encyclopedia, concentrated, and charmed again. "Here," he said. "Your third wish — see if they suit you."

He gave Matty a pair of binoculars.

Matty sat up. He examined the twin black telescopes, his expression incredulous. "You just done these?"

Dafydd nodded.

"And my hand?" Matty held up the bandaged member. "It don't hurt no more. Them pellets is gone." His eyes grew wide. Rumor said there were *two* kinds of charmer — the other kind could *unmake*, besides making things. Matty stared accusingly at Dafydd. "You didn't use no knife." His mouth worked. "You — you done it with your mind, didn't you?"

Dafydd nodded. Would this awesome second secret strain Matty's fidelity? Or would he see it as a chance to capitalize further?

"Why?"

Dafydd recalled a rhyme the *mam* used to recite when adversity grew overwhelming. He said, "Seems your need for a nag is greater than mine is for secrecy."

Matty's brow corrugated in the effort to comprehend. His shifty eyes narrowed. Then he shrugged, as though dismissing the problem. "You're a queer lad, Dafydd."

Dafydd said neutrally. "You're a queer fellow, Matty."

Matty's eyes flicked about the room, carefully avoiding contact with Dafydd's gaze. His mouth opened and closed several times, but the threat and the proposition did not come. Instead he raised the beautiful new binoculars

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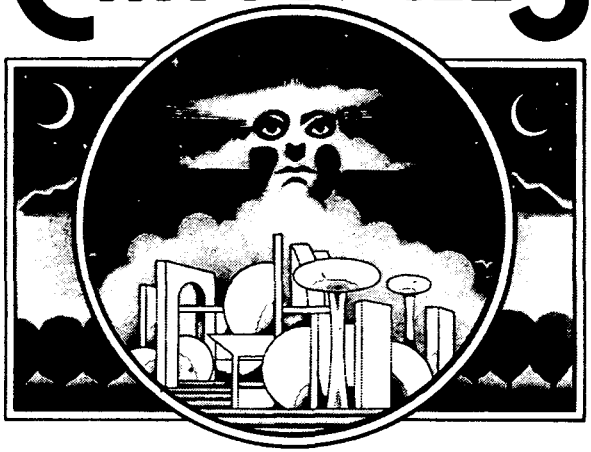

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It's been too long ("Ghost of A Crown," December 1976) since we were treated to one of Brigidier Ffellowes fantastic tales. Here, the Brigadier offers a dandy about an incredible encounter during the final days of World War II.

Commander In the Mist

BY
STERLING E. LANIER

It was a rather normal day, or actually, afternoon, for New York. In November, that is. Crowds were moving along Fifth Avenue in a cold sleeting rain. Traffic was blaring horns and cab drivers were yelling obscenities at jaywalkers, other hapless motorists and each other. The brown-uniformed Traffic Police, including a few women, with the aid of the standard men in blue, were trying to make sense out of it all and, true to the reputation of New York's police over the Earth, were doing so, with terse, barking commands of "Move along there" and "Can't you see the color of a stop light, goddamnit?".

I was standing against the solid stone wall of Central Park, in the low Sixties, which was some protection against the cold wind and wet. The wind was out of the west, over the Hudson River and coming over the few leaves on the park trees with some force. The thin, cold drops of water were apt to be driven down one's neck while walking. Still, I had only two blocks to go. Then the park would end and I could easily cross to my destination.

I was looking downtown and about to move on when I was startled by a voice from my other flank.

"Like the thunder of the city, old chap?" A man stood beside me, his Burberry belted and his slouch hat, some natty Italian make, maybe a Borsalino, slanted over one blue eye. A grin cut across the ruddy, smooth-shaven face, and I wondered again at the absence of lines on it. The Brigadier, as Ffellowes preferred to be called, had been everywhere in the world and not only done most known things, but seemed to have been mixed up in a whole bunch of things no one else had

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not only never done, most people had never conceived of them being remotely possible. His years of service to the British Crown had dumped him in every branch of their army I had ever heard of, and then some! If he's truthful, and I think he is, it would hardly take me by surprise to have him state calmly that he had commanded a battle-cruiser at Jutland or been leader of the much later air strike on Dresden. What a man, and how quietly and unobtrusively he could move! A long period in some intelligence branch or branches, that had taught him this trick, or so he claimed. Now he spoke again, the clipped, even tones cutting through street noise like a knife through butter.

"Don't recognize the quote, do you?" His smile broadened. "It was said to, or thought by, a hero, if you like. Fictional, I'm afraid." He saw from my puzzled look that I had no idea what he was talking about, which was not rare, and went on with his joke. "It was said about this town to one Simon Templar. That ring a bell? Said by or inspired by a lovely girl though, not an aging hack of the Empire."

My memory raced and finally came up with reading long past but still memorable. "For Christ's sake! The Saint! Didn't know you liked that kind of thing, Brigadier. What's the story called?"

"If my recollection serves, very simple. *The Saint in New York*, by that chap, Leslie Charteris. Damned good book, too. You ought to try it. Maybe it's in the club library, hmm?"

"Let's go and look. I was headed there anyway. There's no sun, to put it mildly, and it's getting dark. This park has muggers you know."

My answer didn't make him turn a hair. As a matter of fact, I would have feared for any mugger who tried on Ffellowes, unless he had a team headed by a large tank, to help him.

He was going to the same place I was, and we strolled quickly along the rain-swept street in the growing dark, chatting away together. In no time we were in our club and had shucked our coats and settled down with drinks in the library. He had, not tea, which might have been what he was raised on, but a large cup of black coffee, fresh-ground as the club does it.

There were three or four of our acquaintances in the big room, and they quickly stopped whatever they were gabbing about and drew near to us and around the fire. I knew what they were hoping for, but I could hardly blame them. Any time I got Ffellowes at his ease by a fire, or just relaxed, I hoped for one of his incredible stories. They were rare but fantastic. We all felt the same way, but none of us wanted to beg or put the man at a disadvantage. If we had, we all felt, he might stop coming around at all. Better an occasional tale from the Brigadier, than none at all.

We were simply having a chat,

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about nothing in particular though, and I was about to give up hope of any of his bizarre reminiscences, when we were saved and by a most unlikely person, not to say an improbable one.

A voice like a rusty foghorn sounded from the stairs, and the sound of heavy, clumping shoes. We all straightened in our chairs and even Ffellowes stopped talking. "This God-awful town! I ought to go down to Florida and check on my horses at that stud place, north of Tampa. I got a lot of dough in them things, and IRS ought to be easy on my trips down there. Nobody knows what a real horse-lover has to put out and the work he's got to do. Besides, any excuse to get the hell outta this shit-hole of a town and this weather, will do me." Mason Williams was in full cry and sounded as unpleasant as ever. So much for peace and quiet in the library, was my thought as I watched his bulky shape thudding over our way, red face and bulbous nose under a thinning mop of greying hair. I had forgot our secret weapon, and the incisive syllables stirred me as they always did.

"You seem a trifle out of shape, Williams. Going to put in some time as an exercise-boy? Nothing like it for a horse-lover such as yourself, is there?"

Williams' nasty face turned an even redder hue and verged on the purple in places. He hated Ffellowes anyway and was maddened by the cold contempt which was all he ever got from him. The Englishman fascinated him, more or less the way a cobra is supposed to petrify a bird, though, and he could never stay away from those cold eyes and the gelid tones, when they were about. Now he slouched into one vacant leather armchair and scowled in anger.

"I suppose you British know all about horses, pal," was his opening gun. "No crummy Yank can hold a candle to you jerks and your Grando National jazz. Jeez, why don't you give us a break, Genarul (he knew well that Ffellowes did not care for this title) and let the Amurrican peasants play with their toys in a back room, huh?"

As often he had done before, Brigadier Ffellowes smiled politely. It might have been a parrot squawking or a dog yapping at him. Williams could say nothing than even slightly ruffled him, then or ever. But the next words made us all, and that includes the unspeakable Williams, sit up straighter and also, shut up.

"Why I'm only a fair rider, old man. Hardly know one end of a filly from another. Equine, that is." He smiled gently, and I cast my mind back to other stories which gave the lie to this statement. I held my breath.

"Frankly, I think there may be too much trouble, hunting for horses, you know. Can be fraught with peril and all that sort of thing. To say nothing of experiences that one really doesn't care to recall. I remember the banks of the Danube in '45, now. Very odd and,

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d'you know, men, rather unsettling. Not at this time of year but just this sort of weather. Colder perhaps. No heat pipes running along the *Donau* banks, though once there was some decent heating. In *Palaestrum*, that is. Any of you know it?"

We shook our heads in silence and no one opened his mouth. I don't know about the others, but for me the windy and wet eve of outside Manhattan was totally gone. I wanted to hear this one as I always did, more than anything I could think of. The high, curtained windows of the club library made a good sound barrier and the roar of the city outside was dim and far away.

Ffellowes smiled gently and looked up and off into space for a second. No one opened his yap, and the Brigadier knew, I think, that we were waiting.

"Well, if it would not bore you, it's a vaguely interesting tale. *Palaestrum* is, or was, one of the old Roman bases on the Danube frontier. Got Roman cemeteries and the remains of amphitheaters, even a broken-down HQ or something, which might have had the structure of a palace. I think they're still rooting about there and even finding things now and again. Off in a field, there's some sort of big triumphal arch or something. The Russkies left it alone, though it was in their zone, which seems odd, but perhaps they had other things on their minds. More complexity in the Slav mentality than they often get credit for, you know."

This was more than Williams could take. His anger overcame his fascination, but it did no harm. "Very funny, my dear Genarul. All them Romans and their lousy Empire. Like you Limeys, they ain't around no more, are they? So what has any of this got to do with your Grando National winners? Nothing, right?"

We all held our breath, and I vowed once again to try and find out how Williams had ever got by the Election Committee. But it did no harm.

"Quite right, my dear man. Nothing at all to do with Aintree. But there are other steeds in the world, you know. And I was looking for some. Never found 'em though. To find these horses, it took an old cavalryman. I suppose you've heard of George Patton? Ever hear of the Lippizaners?"

We were all mute again. At the mention of a great American general, even Williams had to clam up. It was very deft, as it always was. And it went calmly on, with no more interruptions.

"As I say, we were looking for horses. At the time, they were far north and east of our location. The Allies, all of us, had swung wide of Vienna and Austria and kept driving north into Germany, quickly, with a sharp lookout being kept. Plenty of Kraut stragglers and broken units about. A lot of 'em wanted to surrender, but not all, not by any means. Several die-hard SS units were in our neighborhood, and God knows what

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else. The main army, ours, was U.S. and French.

We ourselves were a special small unit. We had three American half-tracks though and more than a few bazookas. I was in command and had three officers and a half-company of other ranks. All volunteers and good men. Let me see, I seem to think they were Gloucesters. All combat-proofed and veterans. Some of them went back a long time, to the Western Desert and similar places.

"My Second was a Major Broke, and there were two lieutenants, named Garvin and Embey. A couple of good sergeants, too. All in all, a good, self-contained group.

"We'd been sent south, alone, to find the whereabouts of the famous Spanish Riding School of Vienna and above all, its mounts, the Lippizaners. What, or who, they were destined for, I have no idea. They're back in Austria now, of course, or their descendants are. Your Third Army leader saw to that. As I said, an old cavalryman. Ever know he designed the last saber ever thought of for issue to your mounted troops? Never used, but I've got one somewhere. Very good design, I always thought.

"Anyhow, some Intelligence wallah, probably in London, thought or heard that the damn horses had or were coming by a certain route. We were going to place ourselves, a lost company, on or across said route. Snaffle the animals and bring off a great coup for the British Army. It was all wrong, but so were a lot of efforts of that sort and many a lot more important. Not intention, that was all right. But the dope we'd been given was very late and way off anyway. We were miles from any of our own troops, let alone allies.

"So, as it happens, we found ourselves very close to the Blue Danube. Well, it may have been blue to Strauss, but I've seen a lot of it at one time or another, and it always looked brown and turgid as hell to me. Especially on a cold, spring afternoon, with the bare trees dripping with rain and patches of fog at low points. That, my friends, is how we got to *Palaestrum*. There's a town there, built in the 16th Century or so, just about the time that Spanish School got going, or even earlier. Called *Sankt Udo* or close to it, as I recall. There was a ruined baroque *Schloss*, or castle, the seat of a family named Antenstein, I think. We avoided the town altogether, which was common sense. Anyone or anything could have been in those old houses. But by the castle, which seemed more or less gutted and empty, there ran a narrow dirt track, which, if our info was correct, actually ran down to the river itself. Here, the horses were supposed to cross, on makeshift barges or some gear of that sort or other. And there, if all went well, we would nab them."

He paused and again his eyes went far away. "Wish you all could have seen what we did. Might even put Wil-

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liams off on his devotion to rare equines. As we went left off a battered main highway, with gutted vehicles and ruins all about, it was around fourish in the afternoon of very early spring. The lines of tall trees on either side of our dirt track were bare and dripping wet. There was no wind and only that dank and sodden sound of water dripping. One could hear nothing else when our vehicles had to break their progress and the rumble of their engines fell silent.

"Then, there was a break in the trees. We stopped, for the road or excuse for a road, led out into an open space, largish, with more trees on the far side. All the while the track, by the way, had been running downhill at a slight angle.

"It was Broke, sitting beside me in the back of the lead vehicle, who put a thought into speech. 'Someone destroyed something here, by God. Looks as if it had happened a long time ago, though.'

"Before us, through the thin rain, we could see a vast hole in the ground, bowl-shaped and shallow, grading down to a level and rounded center. There were serrated lines sort of cut all around the rim, actually cut level, into the earth. Here and there, other, deeper cuts made what seemed to be openings or even entrances, which led down ramped earth into the level at the bottom. At a couple of the gaps, battered columns of greyish stone lifted themselves out of the dark soil to about ten or so feet. It brought some memories back, of jaunts in southern Europe long before.

"I laughed, for all our men were swiveling their rocket launchers and machine guns about as they peered off into the obscurity. 'It was a long time ago, Major,' I said. 'I had a briefing by some of the Intell. brass that you missed. But tell the men not to worry, though not to relax. You're looking at some remnants of an old war indeed. We're at *Palaestrum*, friend, and this is a dug-up Roman amphitheater in front of us. Lions and Christians might have come through those gates, or chariots. But the last time troops had to be alerted here was against the Marcomanni or some other beginners at the *Völkerwanderung*. It's their descendants, and remote ones, we have to guard ourselves from. Especially if they have SS badges on the collar.'

"Word was passed through the line back to the other two vehicles, and I could hear a refreshing ripple of amusement when they heard what they were goggling at. But they were too much on the alert to relax entirely. Before I could order it, three men with Stens were out in front of us on foot, just in case something modern was lying in wait somewhere in the ruins of the past. We all waited patiently for an 'All Clear' signal. Far off, through the silence, I now could hear the drone of planes, either ours or Russian we felt sure. The *Luftwaffe* was mostly gone by now. Presently, our scouts came

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back to my half-track. But they had a surprise with them, our first prisoner. She was not very menacing.

"She must have been seventy at least and was a nice-looking old thing, though in ragged and much patched clothes with a ratty old scarf covering grey locks from the cold and wet. She was gabbling away at a great rate, her squint orbs darting from one to the other of us in fright. My German is passable, but I could only make out an occasional word or two. I had had an instructor of the Potsdam variety, and the slurred patois of Austrian peasants was beyond me. But, my luck was in, as usual. From beside me, Broke took over. Turned out he'd spent summers in Austria as a boy, and it was nothing to him. He told the men to let go of the poor old thing and was soon chattering away happily with her, while she began to smile and wave her arthritic paws as she prattled at him. He turned to me at length with a smile on his face.

"'Can I tell the men to let her go, sir? She lives not far away and was only gathering herbs. She knows what we are and has no use for Germans or even her own folk in the German ranks. I think she'll keep her mouth shut.'

"I had a few questions, which he put and she was prompt to answer. She had seen no sign of armor, wagons, horses or uniformed men, save for occasional stragglers in the past weeks. She was delighted to see us, as a matter of fact, since we were not what she was dreading from over the Volga. But as I waved her politely away and the men all smiled at her kindly, she burst out in a torrent of expostulations, pointing ahead in the direction we were going.

"I turned to Broke and he was smiling even more broadly. He bowed and waved the poor thing off and she went, often looking back at us, until she disappeared into the side woods and the gathering mist. Then she was gone and I turned to my companion.

"'Well, sir,' he explained, his teeth showing, 'seems we are still in danger, at least if we push on to the river. There are dread spirits down there, 'on my word, *hexerei* of the most nasty sort. They've always been there by the river, and she meant that too, having been warned by a great-grandfather or somesuch, when a kid herself. Think we dare risk it? We mustn't camp there at night, was an emphasis in that chatter.'

"I laughed. I told him I thought that we could manage that sort of thing, and the men near us laughed as well. So we signaled the others and all of us in our truncated column started engines and we went on past the amphitheater of a lost empire and entered the woods again at the other side. I had sent word that no one was to slack off and all were quite on the *qui vive.*

"It was now getting very dark and gloomy, though we could still hold the track without lights, though just. The rain had stopped and we went on through a cold and windless dark un-

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der the tall shining dark tree trunks, still down a long and gentle slope.

"The man sitting by the driver up front gave us a hand signal then and we all saw it. We had come to great willows, whose dripping branches, still with many small leaves, hung down all about us. But this was not why we had stopped. There in front was dark water, smooth and almost silent in the gathering night, save for a chuckle where a log broke the surface and caused the great river to ripple about it. We were on the Danube, that ancient waterway of race since time began.

"Swirling mists lay on the water's surface also, but not constant any more than they had been in the woods on the slope above. They veiled the waters but only in patches and shifted slowly to reveal new and shadowy vistas and then closed again and reformed anon some way off. In one opening of the white fog, I had seen a thing quite close to us and only a little way upstream, a couple of hundred feet. It had intrigued me for very obvious reasons, since dark was now coming fast. I gave orders and the wagons, all three, were put in a half-circle with the water at our backs. Sentries were posted at good points and silence imposed. I told the men to eat their combat rations cold and keep mum and lightless. Then I took Broke and a couple of well-armed men and all went to what I had spotted. When we got there, I got out a hooded flash and used it on what lay on the ground and also went out into the water.

"It was nothing more than a broad jetty or the shore portion of one." I looked it over carefully and so did the other three. A very thin layer of soil and leaves did not hide what lay underneath. I was struck silent by it. There were massive blocks of some stone or other, rough and worn yet still strong and solid. The chief wear was logically on our left side, the upstream side. The whole mass thrust out into the Danube for some fifty or so feet and then came to a stop.

"'Not built yesterday, men,' I said at length. 'This is part of ancient Rome, if I'm not wrong, and was one of their piers. Probably been used by fishers and such, since the 4th Century, and still has uses. I rather think what we're looking for will be coming this way. Good place to tie up to, and a riverman, coming from the other side, would not have too much trouble finding it. Even at night and a night like this one.'

"So that was all. We went back and sent the same two men with one of the veteran sergeants back to the pier we had found. They were to stay low and keep a sharp lookout. We were deep in enemy country. We were winning but not here or yet.

"The rest of us, having arranged watches and checked all the posts where the inland advance guard was to keep watch, ate and turned in. I chatted for a bit with the three officers and then curled up in my waterproof under

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a blanket on one of the half-tracks. The night was very silent, save for the burble of the river and the steady drip from the trees, which blended with it. Every so often, planes would hum in the distance and once I heard a far-off thud which may have been a major explosion. But that was all, and I soon fell into an easy slumber, having satisfied myself that I had taken all precautions and done the best I could. I had a quiet smile as I dropped off. Even the ghosts the old girl had been so afraid of, wherever they were, were good and quiet."

Outside the big, high-ceilinged room, the thunder of one of man's great cities seemed very far away. Save for our breathing and an occasional crackle from the fire, all was silent about us. I saw more than one mouth stay open as we waited for the next words of that silent, far-off night in an alien land.

"It was one of the younger officers who woke me up. I flicked a glance at my watch and it was two a.m. on a very dark morning. I could hear nothing and the night was silent, save for the plash of water and the fainter drip of that on the trees.

"'Don't know what's up, sir,' was the low-voiced message. 'The sergeant sent one of his watch back a second ago, from that bridgehead you found. They've heard some sound they don't like, I gather.'

"I was on my feet quickly. I hissed at him to alert all hands and that I would go over and check myself on whatever it was. I drew my Webley from its holster and, at a crouch, eeled over to where the sergeant was waiting for me, in the shadow of a willow trunk by the ancient pier. I could feel his tension, even in the dark, and I could not even see his face clearly. The fogs were heavier now and, with the night as well, we were in a lightless shroud.

"'We have heard something, sir,' came his hoarse whisper. 'Maybe it's what we're expecting. Very quiet and the sound of a few men marching. But, I heard metal clink and so did the other three.' He paused. 'Something else, too. What might have been a couple of horses, maybe unshod or walking on them leaves and stuff. That could be for us, now, right, sir?"

"'I patted his arm and we listened intently. For some time, I heard only the usual night noise and the river. Once an owl hooted, faintly and a long piece off. Then when I was beginning to wonder if the men had bad dreams, I heard it myself.'

"It was the sound of soft but regular footsteps, more than one, as if in that utter dark, some folk could actually keep in step. Too, just as the man had said, there came a clink of metal and now a creaking as well, which might have been leather or something like that. I held my breath and sure enough, there came the other sound. It was heavy and caused by some weight, but even muffled and hard to make

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out, it was quite close and the sound of more than two feet.

"I told him to get his men facing out and stay with them. I would stay hid at the pier's foot and meet whatever it was. The others were on alert and ready to chip in if needed. He faded from my side and I crept over to a tree bole where I had said. Then we all waited in that dark and soggy night. Not even the hum of a plane was heard, as we all faced away from the river to the black wall of the wood.

"The sound of the muffled but regular pace, of both man and beast, came even closer. And, suddenly, I saw what I was listening to, or at least part of it. And what a sight it was!

"There in front of me, perhaps ten yards off, was a man and he held in one hand a kind of rude torch. I had heard no sound of its being lit; it was suddenly on and illumined what lay under it to my startled eye. I stood up and stepped forward, and a voice, that of the man in front of me, cried out something. I held up my empty left hand, palm outward, so he could see it. He stared at me, his jaw set, and then he spoke to me.

"'Who are you?' he began, 'and what do you here on our side. You are on the lands of the Empire, Barbarian, and what do you here at night? It is death to be here and a ban exists. Do you understand me?'

"He was a short swarthy man, smooth-faced, and must have been given a short haircut, for none showed below his helmet. But he was no youth and his strong jaw had white scar lines. The eyes were dark and sharp and there were many wrinkles at the corners. I stood, frozen by a paralysis strong enough to melt bones. And suddenly the cold of the night went through my very soul, as if the wavering aura of torchlight around the figure before me had some malign and invisible miasma of its own. I could only stare, mouth wide open at what I saw.

"First, there was the helmet, of what looked like battered brass, dented and with verdigris over some of it. It was rounded, with a tail coming down the back of the neck and flaring around the sides. A ridge of smooth metal crowned it, also dented. He wore a tunic of stained leather, and on his breast was the brass of a *pectorale* which screened the chest. His brownish kilt came to his knees, and his boots were soft leather but with greave armor on their fronts. The *gladius*, the two-edged Spanish or Celtiberian short sword, was hung from a shoulder belt. Tucked into this belt was what looked like a switch or crop.

"Then and for the first time that I realized what tongue I had been hearing. My Sixth Form at school came back with a rush to me. The barking voice was in Latin! I could understand it perfectly well, save for an occasional word. But something old and cold had come into my spirit. Time had stood still and all thought of the present was gone, as if it were some ephemeral cloud.

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"I heard the voice of the sergeant over my shoulder and close by as if it were from another world. All I heard was, 'Are you all right....' and then the figure in front of me barked a command.

"There was a sudden movement in the dark behind him, and something whizzed past my head. There was a sharp sound like a branch being broken, and I felt, rather than saw, a figure slump to the ground on my right and rear.

"'Tell those *Massagetae* of yours to stay back,' rapped the voice from the front, 'and stand still yourself, even if you are their Prince!'

"I did not move and it was not voluntary. My hand was still raised and now even higher. Had Adolf seen me, he would have been proud, save that it was the wrong hand. I knew why that open hand was raised too, and terror crept through me. Was this a bad dream or the end of the world? The silent, fog-ensorcelled night had eaten all sounds but what I heard, and now I heard a new sound.

"It was the earthy sound of a horse pacing and it was coming out of the blackness behind the man before me, straight for us. Its head appeared in the light and I saw the gleam of silvery and gilt chains across its brow. A man, a very dark man, whose eyeballs flashed in the torchlight, was leading it. I hardly looked at him, but got the idea that he was swathed in white robes and had a hood pulled back of the same hue.

"It was the mounted man, whose mount he was leading, it was he whom I watched as my arm grew even stiffer. I could no longer even feel the Webley in my right fist.

"This new appearance was striking. His *lorica*, the cuirass on his chest, gleamed with a yelow light, and I knew gold when I saw it. It was ornate, too, and I saw scrollwork and the glitter of gems on his breast. He too wore a helmet but his was of finely wrought gold, and surmounting its gleaming ridge was a higher, great ridge of scarlet, running from the front to the rear, upright and narrow. The helmet had a slight bill over the dark eyes, and — oh, yes — thrown back over his shoulders was a heavy and shimmering cloak, whose golden fringe accented the deeper purple of the main body of the garment.

"His face, that of a mature and stern man, as hairless as the first man's, gripped my gaze. It was commanding, that face, and yet, somehow, it was weary, with an unutterable tiredness. A thrill of ice went through me as I met those dark, weary eyes. Then he spoke, though not to me, and I flinched inside as I heard the voice of a doomed and mighty shade, for it contained all the weariness of the ages, mingled with its great authority. Tears came unbidden to my eyes and yet I stood frozen, held in that fog and dark by some mind-bending, tragic power.

"'What have we here, Legate? More incursions of the hordes of the

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East? They look strange enough to have come from the far, strange land of silks, on which our women will always waste our substance.' His horse turned slightly and he addressed me, myself.

"His speech was plain, his voice of a deep timbre. '*Principes Barbarii*, this place and this river are forbid when *Noctens* rules. Not even the *Foederati* in my pay can come here then, not if they wish to live. My priests and some of ancient Set from the far-off *Nilus*, they have all laid this ban, and the dark powers will enforce if as did my own slinger from *Balearica*. Should you wish to take service, this is done only when Apollo himself is high in the Heavens. Otherwise, get you gone or the Powers of Darkness will hold you forever. I guard *Vindobonum* yet and always will and these are approaches that no one can cross the mighty river upon and live without an eternal price upon them.'"

Ffellowes fell silent and the room stayed that way too. The thunder of New York was a far-distant murmur, and only a glow of remaining coals lit the high, dark of the big room. We were all a long way off, in time and space and only breathing was audible. At length, he spoke once more and finished his tale.

"We were, you fellows see, trapped by a thing that had emerged from the ages and the mists, not only of the river but the mists of time. In the next morning, after I had quietly nursed the sergeant, whose skull, for he'd taken off his helmet, was not cracked but badly gashed, I told everyone else that I had seen two stray nags, lost from some farm, and nothing else. The sergeant, who was concussed, looked at me but did not give me the lie. No one else had seen anything but the flicker of a light, which I explained as St. Elmo's fire and quite natural. Before we went back to work and retraced our steps northwest, I gave the sergeant a smooth black pebble. It was apparent-

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ly lava, and I have seen thousands on the Majorca or Ibizan beaches before and since.

"When I came back to myself lying on the ground in the still, cold glimmer of early day and amid the first piping of birds, I had a great deal of thought pass through my dazed head. Was *Vindobonum* which is the ancient name for Vienna, still sacrosanct and if so, how? Well, if it were, I knew how, deep in my heart. The last of the great stoic emperors, the Divine Marcus Aurelius, had died there. You'll find his maxims in this room if you care to look for them. We two had seen and one had felt the effect of a Balearic slinger, a picked man from one of what amounted to the machine-gun units of the oldest army to ever guard the Danube frontier.

"And who was the man who had spoken to me from the back of his own charger? Well, I just gave you his name, my friends."

The room was so silent that no breath could be heard as Ffellowes spoke his last words. I can hear them still.

"The mists were all about us, gentlemen. In the forest, out on the river, and I had them forever in my mind. For I had spoken to something awesome and of great and unconquerable dignity, from a far-away past and a duty unflagging through the mists of time. For, you see, in search of those rare horses, I had found something rarer and far more tragic and yet, you know, still mighty. I had heard the voice of a self-imposed guard to all he held sacred. I had heard the Commander in the Mist."

The vast room was silent as seldom before. We had all been given a glimpse into the long-lost ages. We too had heard the words of ... the Commander in the Mist.

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Frank Catalano writes that he is currently anchoring news and running the public affairs department for a Seattle-area radio station, freelancing science fiction and horror short stories and writing sf book reviews for United Press International. Happy Valentine's Day!

Love Object

BY

FRANK CATALANO

Boogie Nights ... they will take you higher ... Boogie Nights...."

I sat at the control board, rapidly pulling commercials for the next break. The digital timer on the board showed less than 30 seconds remaining on the song. I popped the three spot cubes in the player, in order: ALLTIME INSURANCE, TERMINAL UNLOADING ASSOCIATES, and COMPUTER MATING SERVICE. All thirties, all ready to go.

The ten-second fade warning flashed on the player. I automatically hit the lighted button marked MIKE, and it went up to the pre-set level. The implanted talkback unit let me monitor the last few notes of the song as I announced into the audio-pickups surrounding me:

"Music on E-R-O-Q from the late 1970s. That's Heatwave with 'Boogie Nights.' It's 22-oh-four, Friday night, with Prysm. I'll be back with more Earth rock in less than two minutes."

I hit the first cube start button with my right hand as my left punched the MIKE button off. Turning, I listened with one ear as ALLTIME INSURANCE ran and mechanically started TERMINAL UNLOADING when it ended. I had reached for another oldie, this one called "Tear It Up" by the Dead Boys from 1982, when UNLOADING ended, and COMPUTER MATING SERVICES started to play.

Or should have started to play.

Something was wrong. There was no sound coming out of my talkback. I tapped it, to make sure it was on, and punched up the manual player start. Still nothing. I made a mental check — about five seconds had passed. Five seconds of dead air from our broadcast satellite to the millions of humans listening to us. Christ, there goes my job.

Frantically, I hit the manual player start again to get the cube running.

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After punching the button two more times, and almost pushing it through the control board in frustration, I stopped. On the player itself, the RUN light was glowing. But there was no sound. I turned to check the digital timer; then I noticed the timer still showed we were one minute exactly out of "Boogie Nights." Impossible, I thought, reflexively jabbing the start button again. I checked the timer once more, the timer that was hooked up to the nuclear power supply in the base of the satellite, the timer that was always correct. Except this once. It had frozen, locked pensively at "Boogie Nights" plus one minute.

I stared at the timer, both it and I frozen in place, except for my finger occasionally jabbing the player start button.

"So far, that's the best reaction I've seen to a time displacement."

I shook my head. I thought I had heard a voice through my talkback.

"I said: that's the best reaction I've seen to a time displacement so far."

I realized I wasn't imagining. There *was* somebody patched into my talkback implant. I instinctively jabbed the start button again and said, "What's going on?" It came out a lot weaker than I had intended.

The little voice chuckled. "Nothing time won't cure." It chuckled again. "Just a simple little time displacement, bozo. I've frozen time around you in a manner too complex for you to possibly understand."

Another pause. The impression that this audio visitor was enjoying my confusion crept in at the edge of my mind and gave me something familiar to hang on to: rage. *"What the hell do you want?"*

Another chuckle. Christ. "Great, just great. This is more like. Indignant announcer faces the unknown bravely. Okay, 'what do I want'? Just a little of your, hmmm, time...." Another damn chuckle — "to talk. Here, let me re-associate myself."

I heard through the talkback static, and then to the right of my control board, sitting atop the cube player, a figure began to appear. It faded in until I could see a small figure, about half-a-meter tall, sitting with folded legs. The figure was dressed in a billowy white toga. And it had a cherubic face to match.

"How...." I started.

".... Did I do that?" It's eyes lit up. "You'd never understand."

I checked the timer again, and it still read "Boogie Nights" plus sixty seconds. "Oh, I can keep that up indefinitely," the figure assured me. "Alternate time-line energy flow. Not to worry. When we're done, your listeners won't even know any time has passed.

"Now to business. I didn't have much of a chance to look into your background, but you'll have to do for this sector. Now," he motioned one pudgy arm to indicate the control room, "you run this facility, correct?"

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"Round the clock," I agreed.

"Good." A slight grin. "Now, according to my research, this outfit you call Earth R-O-Q hits the most humans of any other satellite radio broadcaster. What I want you to do is to play them love songs for the next twenty-four hours and talk — in veiled terms — of procreation."

"You mean —" I started, puzzled.

"Yes. Sex."

"Why? You're right about the ratings, of course, but love songs?"

"Humans have a curious little custom, now nearly forgotten. Old time month February, date the 14th. A day of love, for all things, for all people, in all ways. But nobody really gives it more than lip-service anymore. It needs to be brought back into their fast-paced, mechanical lives as a contrast."

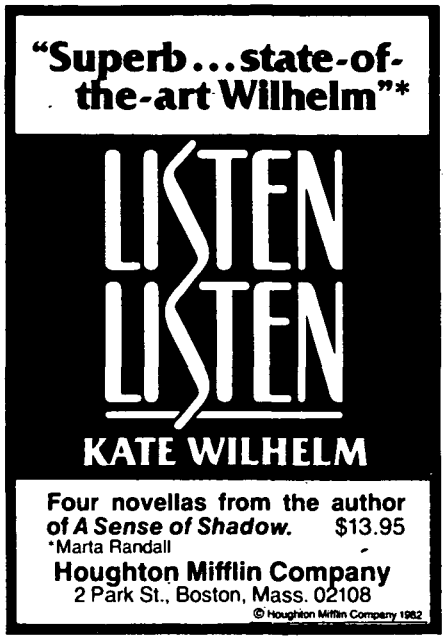
He started to fade away. "Oops, got to go and make other visits. Your time clock will start up in thirty seconds. Don't forget what I told you."

"But what's *your* stake in this?"

His face clouded. For the first time, the grin disappeared. "Revitalization. A new start. A chance to do what I was created to do. And, who knows, maybe I'll get my crossbow back. Old legends die hard, but we do die. Goodbye." And he faded away.

As he disappeared, the time clock re-started, and COMPUTER MATING SERVICE played into my talkback. I thought about what the cherub had said and dismissed it from my mind.

Sure, it would be great for a rap. But how effectively could I pull it off? I mean, Christ — what does an announcer model DJ1440 know about procreation?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Robert Young's latest novel, THE LAST YGGDRASIL, will be published shortly by Del Rey Books. His new story concerns a 25th century spacecraft pilot named D'etoile who is on galactic rim patrol when he comes across an old space station that to his eyes has the aspect of a medieval castle, perhaps a haunted one....

Invitation to the Waltz

BY
ROBERT F. YOUNG

The stray space station did not belong in D'etoile's day and age, nor did it belong in the rim regions of the galactic lens. Yet there it was, revolving slowly and smoothly, less than a hundred kilometers off the patrol craft's port bow.

To D'etoile's twenty-fifth century eyes it had the analogous aspect of a medieval castle cast adrift in time. He was on galactic rim patrol, on the lookout for *tsempi* — C-fluctuations that sometimes gave birth to severe photon storms against which his home-world could not defend itself without adequate forewarning. Here, the stars had thinned out to the point of near extinction; here, seemingly at his elbow, yawned the abyss of metagalactic space, while billions of light-years out, pale blurs in the vast blackness, lay a trio of extragalactic nebulae.

Although backgrounded by the dazzling star-clouds of the galactic hub, the station was so remote from the nearest sun as to be a star in its own right. The patrol craft's instruments indicated that it was moving rimward, either of its own volition or still propelled by the hypothetical thrust, or series of thrusts, that had de-orbited it and set it on a starless course that had enabled it to retain its new-found independence. As for its provenance, it had "matrix world" written all over it, which meant it must have been traveling rimward for centuries. D'etoile was not surprised when it did not respond to his radioed challenge, but he was annoyed. Duty demanded that he board it and check it out, and he did not want to. Something about it — its bizarre design, perhaps — repelled him.

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It grew rapidly in the viewscreen as he closed in. Space stations were considered unnecessary extravagances these days, but such had not always been the case. Before the development of the trans-Sweike Drive made stellar colonization practicable, the matrix-world — Earth — had built and orbited thousand of such vehicles. Primitive to begin with, they had become increasingly elaborate and sophisticated as space technology graduated from Kindergarten into First Grade. Finally, private enterprise had got into the act, and "starsinos," "astrels," "catellites," and "starbars" had begun appearing in the sky. Vast, cumbersome affairs to modern eyes — metallic castles with little to redeem them save their celestial ambience.

When the station completely filled the view screen, D'etoile programmed the A.P. to locate the boat bay, home in on it and dock. Then he put on his suit. Before closing the equipment locker, he got out a lock-disengager and pocketed it. He doubted very much that there would be anyone to let him in.

He armed himself with a medium-range raze pistol, but this was standard procedure.

By this time the station was so close he could see the myriad pockmarks that successive meteor swarms had made in its black hull. It had a foreboding aspect, and there was no sign of a boat bay — at least none that he could see. Maybe he should reprogram the A.P. to back off. But his fears proved groundless. The station turned out to have an old-type Jenkinsonian sphincter-dock, into which the A.P. had no difficulty fitting the patrol craft's prow. After the boarding light came on, D'etoile went through the inner- and outer-hatch locks and emerged in the bay. With the aid of the disengager, he passed through the station's outer- and inner-locks with similar ease and stepped into the station proper. He found himself standing in a crimson-carpeted corridor filled with reddish light. From the distance came the sound of music.

The reddish light had no discernible source and appeared to emanate from the walls and ceiling, which were the same color as the carpet. But D'etoile knew better. Psychohistory dwelled at considerable length upon the Freudian conflict implicit in the matrix world's passion for hiding or disguising light sources and its concomitant passion for life-styles lifted from the dark pages of the past. As for the music, it was undoubtedly taped and had probably been activated, along with the light, by the opening and/or closing of the inner-lock.

The mini-instrument panel inset just below eye-level in his helmet indicated an amenable atmosphere, a congenial temperature and a gravity twice that of the patrol craft's. He had surmised as much from the condensation

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(now dispersed) that had filmed his visor and from an increased heaviness of his limbs. Nevertheless, he did not remove his suit. The instrument panel was neither omniscient nor infallible, and there was no need for him to remove his suit in any case.

Despite the music, despite the amenable atmosphere, despite the congenial temperature, he didn't for one instant believe that the station contained any living beings other than himself. He began walking down the corridor toward the source of the music. The reddish radiance made everything seem unreal, umpugned his own reality. He could hear a faint humming sound in the background and knew that ancient suction fans were at work, circulating the dead air, cleansing it, replenishing its oxygen content from hidden hydroponic vats. Like most such matrix-world stations, this one was self-perpetuating.

Presently the corridor debouched into a huge, balconied room. Suspended from the lofty ceiling was a rotating chandelier in the shape of a barred-spiral nebula. The radiance raining down from it ran the gamut of the spectrum, successively bathing the floor and the dancers below in red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet light. Staring at the whirling dancers, noting their formalized steps and elegant evolutions, D'etoile realized that the musical composition to which they were dancing was a waltz — a waltz composed centuries before they were born; resurrected like the room to titillate a civilization in which art had atrophied and died.

The dancers, for all their seeming reality, were no more than projections — projections emanating along with the music from an audio-visual tape-bank hidden in the walls. Probably they had been taped when the waltz-tape was in progress and were now an inseparable part of it. Some of them, no doubt, were the ghosts of the dead who sat at the encompassing tables, watching.

Not all of the dead "watched." Some had slipped from their chairs and lay like bags of bones upon the floor. Others had slumped forward onto the tables, phalanxes encircling the stems of empty glasses.

Most of the tables were empty.

D'etoile raised his eyes to the balcony that ringed the room, to the doors it gave onto. The thought of what he might find beyond their enigmatic panels made him shudder.

The waltz ended, the dancers vanished from the floor. Immediately another waltz began and other dancers — or perhaps the same ones — appeared. Revolted, fascinated, he studied the phantasmagoria before him, unaware of his ambivalence. The women — girls — were in their late teens and early twenties. They wore outlandish décolleté gowns of lurid hues; their hair was heaped into grotesque coiffures; their faces were gruesome with rouge. The men were of various ages:

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some were young, some old, most of middle years. All wore formal attire — black suits, black ties, black shoes.

The dead were dancing with the dead.

That was Wilde, wasn't it?

Yes. Oscar Wilde. A revenant himself. Haunting the dark streets after his disgrace. Penning *Reading Gaol.*

Sick world, D'etoile thought. Robbing its own past like a common thief. Building catellites in the sky instead of cathedrals. Fucking the iceman when it was betrothed to the farthest star.

Old Whore-Mother Earth.

Again he raised his eyes to the balcony, to the enigmatic doors. He traced the railing around to where it curved down to the ballroom floor, to where the stairs began. He found himself mounting them with reluctant tread. There would be records somewhere that would tell him all he needed to know, but a macabre curiosity compelled him to find out all he could firsthand.

He tried the first door he came to. It was locked. He tried another and another. At length he came to one that yielded to his touch and he stepped into the room beyond. It was a small room, permeated with the same reddish radiance that permeated the corridor. There was a bureau, a chair, a washstand and a bed. The bed was empty. Inset in the ceiling directly above it was a large rectangular mirror.

He returned to the balcony and tried the next door. When it did not give he drew his raze pistol and incinerated the lock. He went inside. The scene was a facsimile of the one he had just viewed. Except for the rotted clothing draped over the back of the chair—

Except for the bones on the bed.

They comprised two intermingled skeletons. The ribs of the upper, larger one were entangled with the ribs of the lower, smaller one. The two skulls lay side by side on the rotted pillow, one face down, the other grinning up into the mirror, as though amused by what it saw.

D'etoile tried three more doors. Two were unlocked and gave into rooms that told him nothing. He burned through the third and found two more skeletons. They lay facing each other on the bed. The right femur and tibia of the smaller rested across the left innominate bone of the larger bone of the larger, phalanxes dangling in the red gloom.

Old Whore-Mother Earth.

D'etoile went looking for the control room. He found it finally. It was above the crimson corridor, at the top of a narrow spiral stairway that began just to the right of the inner-lock. He had failed to discover it earlier because the door that gave access to it was indistinguishable, at first glance, from the wall.

Another skeleton — indubitably that of the pilot — greated him when he entered the room. He ignored it as

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best he could and searched for the station's log. When he found it, it told him the whole grisly story.

Sickened, he descended the stairway, re-emerged in the corridor. In the ballroom, a new waltz had begun. He knew he should depart at once, but he did not: instead, he returned to the ballroom and resumed watching the waltzers with the same ambivalence.

Somehow he was not surprised when she emerged from the shadows on the far side of the room. In a way he had known all along that she was there. Waiting. She came walking toward him across the crowded floor. Tall, white-gowned, stately. Her black hair, heaped high on her head, gleamed in the spectral light. Her blood-red mouth accentuated the stark whiteness of her face. Her eyes held the blackness of metagalactic space.

She held out her hands to him. "Shall we dance?"

They danced. To the waltz that had just begun. To *Wein, Weib und Gesang*, by Strauss.

They whirled among the ghosts, through them; he, awkward in his spacesuit, she, light as the air she was made of, yet somehow substantial in his arms.

She said, laughing, "My name is Treponema Pallidum."

He said, shuddering, "I know."

She said, "In space, I came into my own."

He said, "I know."

The barred-spiral nebula above them shifted to the red end of the spectrum. She said, whirling with him in the incarnadine gloom, "I mutated. I grew stronger and more virulent. I became capable of accomplishing overnight what once had taken me years. I mastered intercorporeal flight. I acquired the ability to remain dormant for millennia."

He said, "I know."

She said, "The Space Authority quarantined the station and dispatched an epidemiologist to seek me out and destroy me. He tried every antibiotic and every drug he knew. He even tried mercury and Salvarsan."

He said, "I know."

She said, "When he failed, he ordered the pilot to de-orbit and destruct. But I had already reached the pilot. Now, I got to the epidemiologist. The pilot managed to de-orbit just before he died. The epidemiologist jettisoned himself." She grinned. "I invited everyone who remained to the waltz. And now I've invited you."

He screamed, "You can't reach me! My suit is impervious!"

Shrill laughter spurted from her blood-red mouth, shattering the strains of Strauss. He backed away, but not before her long crimson nails raked his chest. Horrified, he turned and ran from the floor. At the mouth of the corridor, he paused and looked back. He glimpsed her just before she blended back into the shadows of the far side

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of the room. Or perhaps back into the shadows of his mind.

He remained for a full hour in the absolute-zero vacuum of the boat bay. A purification rite. Immediately after passing through the hatch-locks into the patrol craft, he removed his suit and all his clothing and jettisoned them through the disposal tube. An unnecessary precaution, perhaps, but he was taking no chances. He threw his raze pistol in after them; then he went directly to the shower, where he lathered himself with the strongest antibacterial soap the supply closet contained. After rinsing and drying himself, he anointed his entire body with isopropyl. He gargled with mouthwash till he nearly gagged. Wearing fresh clothing, seated once again in the cockpit, he permitted himself a single sigh of relief. Then he went to work.

He retroed five hundred kilometers, turned the patrol craft broadside and centered the distant twinkle of the catellite on the cross hairs of the starboard cannon. The first hit turned the station into a crimson flower; the second reduced it to cosmic dust. He allowed himself another sigh of relief; then he programmed the A.P. to resume its original course and began recording a Report of Incident and Action. By the time he finished, "night" was on hand.

D'etoile slept the maximum seven hours that regulations permitted, but upon awakening he did not feel refreshed. When he stood up on the deck, he found himself swaying and he had difficulty getting into his clothes. Dressed, he forgot briefly where he was; then, remembering, he stepped into the tiny galley and made coffee. He gazed for some time at the familiar trio of extragalactic nebulae glowing palely in the galley viewscreen before he remembered that the galley had no viewscreen. Aghast, he backed out of the room.

He heard a faint rustling, as of a woman's gown. Turning, he beheld her standing in the narrow passageway. She was grinning. The flesh of her face was half gone; her heaped-up hair had matted and strands had broken free and fell to her decaying shoulders. She reached out a bony hand to touch his face, but he saw it only vaguely through the dark tertiary curtain that fell before his gaze. He found himself lying on the deck, listening to her laughter. It was superseded, during his last moment, by the strains of *Wein, Weib und Gesang.*

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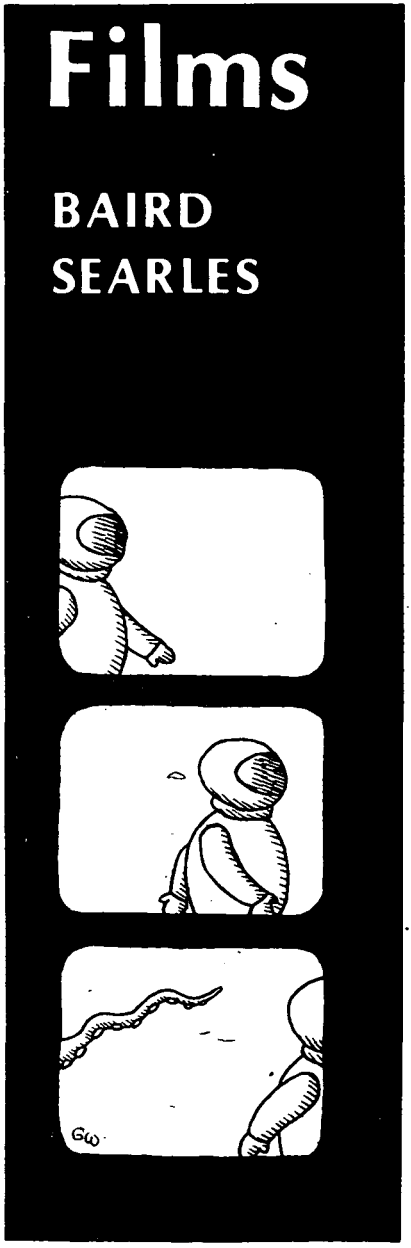
Films

BAIRD SEARLES



Drawing by Gahan Wilson

BUNGLED BANDITS AND A FAITHFUL FRANKENSTEIN

I've been a Monty Python fan since that very first film, *And Now For Something Completely Different*, showed here before the TV series had been seen anywhere in this country except maybe Texas. And so I had high hopes for *Time Bandits* as a sort of linear descendant of MP, even though I've felt the other spinoff films have demonstrated that their humor is in form and style much more of television than of movies. (It's a curious phenomenon of our time that anything that is very successful on TV must then be transferred to the BIGGER — in size and bucks — medium, for which it may not be suited.)

The somewhat garbled early reports I'd gotten from reviews in *Punch* and such like (it's amazing how the simplest s/f or fantasy concepts can confuse non-aficionados) made *Time Bandits* sound like a viable fantasy idea. For those who have been in a cave for the past six months, it concerns a young boy more or less carried along with six little men who fall in and out of his bedroom one night. They have stolen a map from the Supreme Being for whom they work which shows the locations of various holes in time, through which they are making their inept way in search of loot. With them, he has various misadventures in assorted eras as well as The Time of Legends, where they meet an

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ogre with chronic backache and a giant, eventually ending up in the Fortress of Ultimate Darkness confronting Evil incarnate, who wants the map.

And so I was set for a merry romp through time; I'm afraid I was for the most part disappointed. *Time Bandits* doesn't work as fantasy because it's trying so hard to be funny; never for a moment did I believe what was going on, or that anything was being done for anything except comic effect, for the most part. This would be OK if it *were* funny. It isn't, relying heavily on the anachronistic — John Cleese as Robin Hood muttering about the redistribution of wealth — which has been overdone of late, and the effete — David Warner playing Evil as a sort of unwitty Quentin Crisp, airily crying "Sorry!" as he zaps a minion by accident. And, I, for one, do not at this point find anything intrinsically funny about dwarfs.

There are moments, though not funny ones. The Archaic Greece segment is mostly straight, reflecting the boy's joy and wonder in this heroic age. Mycenae is "played" by what is obviously a strange and wonderful North African locality, which gives a peculiar but visually striking picture of ancient Hellas, and Sean Connery is a hero worthy of hero worship as Agamemnon, valiant and charming, a sort of B.C. 007.

The Fortress of Ultimate Darkness exterior is an awesome set (or is it an effect?*), something like the Death Star turned sideways and taken root. And if there is a Supreme Being, there is no way that he could look like anyone save Sir Ralph Richardson, nattily attired in business suit and fussily omniscient. (George Burns? Pooh!)

The other major actors I found less rewarding. I've been overdosing on reruns of *Fawlty Towers* lately, which may be why I found Cleese's stiff-jawed, hypocritically polite on-the-edge-of-hysteria Robin Hood not so funny as it might have been. Shelley Duvall now seems permanently portraying Olive Oyl rather than perpetually auditioning for the role, Michael Palin had nothing to do except try to upstage Duvall (surprising, since he's co-author), and Katherine Helmond showed no more talent than she had in *Soap*.

In all, *Time Bandits* is neowhimsy, reminding me of that oddball film of the 1950s, *The Five-Thousand Fingers of Dr. T*, and calculated to appeal to the child in all of us. It's the kind of thing that leads me to suspect, thank God, that there is no child in me.

Late show dept.... I made a curious discovery the other day — or the other night, I should say. As is inevitable, the wee small hours are the only time when anything interesting is scheduled; in this case, it was a Frankenstein film I'd never run across. I thought I

**At least it's not a costume, which the ogre's ship is at one point.*

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knew all of them, from Whale to Warhol; the title of this one, *Terror of Frankenstein*, could have been one of a dozen Hammer films (them I can't tell apart), but what caught my eye was the fact that it was listed as a Swedish-Irish production, which you don't come across every day.

It was indeed binational — the camera operators were Lasse Karlsson and Paddy Ahern, for instance, and the cast was equally divided between O's and -sons — but the major distinction of the movie is that is astonishingly faithful to Mary Shelley's novel.

Anyone who has read the work will know just how radically the various films have diverged from it. Even the beautiful *Frankenstein: The True Story*, scripted by Christopher Isherwood, while retaining many elements that the other films lacked, drifted in and out of Shelley's vision.

Terror of Frankenstein retains the framing narrative of the captain of the icebound boat in the Arctic. The creation involves no huge lab or monstrous machines, just a bare attic room, a kite and a thunderstorm. The creature is not visibly a construct; it looks almost human, but subtly, like a dead human. It becomes articulate slowly and follows Victor, who has abandoned it at the moment of its first breath, and the two have that strange conversation over a fire in the forest.

This is not a successful horror film; I'm not even sure it's a successful film. But as a realization of the novel, and a contrast to all the other Frankenfilms, it's fascinating.

There's just one thing that would have given Mary pause. One of the credits reads: "Based on the novel by Mary Shelly." Oh, dear.

Coming Soon

Next month: the cover story (art by Carl Lundgren) is titled SWARM. It's by newcomer Bruce Sterling and concerns a remarkable alien society. Also, brand-new stories by Isaac Asimov, Michael Shea and others.

The April issue is on sale March 2. See the coupon on page 80.

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In which Kedrigern the wizard, on the road to perform a minor curse-lifting mission, takes on a new apprentice and encounters a wounded dragon....

A Welcome Bit of Assistance

BY
JOHN MORRESSY

The ale was warm and insipid. Kedrigern held it in his mouth for a moment, irresolute, then closed his eyes and gulped it down. It tasted like a distillation of the venial sins of petty-minded men.

He set his greasy, dented mug down on the undulating surface of the sticky table top, made a wry unhappy face, wiped his lips on his sleeve, and wished he were home. He loved his home. He hated travel.

Home meant comfort and tranquility and the company of Princess, the sky-eyed, the raven-tressed; travel meant a noisy, smelly press of strangers. Home was cold ale in a silver tankard, not scummed-over ditch-water in a filthy mug. Home was the prompt attentiveness of his faithful troll Spot, not the shuffling dereliction of a surly, blotchy tapster. Kedrigern dwelt long on absent pleasures and resolved that once home, he would not soon leave again, not even for the pleading of Vosconu the Openhanded.

Thinking further, he wavered. Vosconu had certainly lived up to his name. Eighty casks of wine was munificent payment for lifting one small, amateurish curse from Voscunu's vineyards.

Preoccupied, Kedrigern sipped his ale without thinking and nearly gagged. His resolution firmed and set. No, never again. Helping Vosconu meant traveling, and traveling meant stopping at verminous sties like Hossel's Inn. Better one's own plain ale at home than Vosconu's finest vintage at such a price.

A husky man with a tangle of black hair and beard merging to enclose his weather-browned face settled on the bench across from Kedrigern. "What news, traveler?" he said amicably, set-

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ting his bow against the table and laying a quiver of arrows on the bench beside him.

"The world is going to hell on horseback," said the wizard morosely.

"That's no news."

"Best I can manage. Sorry."

"No need to apologize, traveler. There's little enough news these days, good or bad," said the other. Swiveling in his place, he bawled for ale, then turned to Kedrigern once again. "I've got some news, though," he said with a smug wink.

Kedrigern raised an eyebrow to suggest a mild interest he did not truly feel. He disliked having strangers intrude upon his privacy, particularly when he was brooding over injustices and pondering suitable retaliation. All the same, he tried to be civil. One never knew what one might learn from a chance remark.

"Oh, yes, I've got news you won't hear in every tavern," said the bowman, nodding and giving another wink.

"How very lucky you are," Kedrigern murmured.

"Yes. Big news. Of course, I can't go telling everyone I meet. Not until I've informed the proper authorities."

Kedrigern was in no mood to coax the news out of him. He fell silent and resumed his brooding. So it was not until the innkeeper, Hossel himself, brought the fellow's ale that the bowman, as if surrendering to universal pleading, said, "Oh, I suppose there's no harm in telling a few honest men."

"Telling what, Fletcher?" asked the innkeeper.

"My news, cousin. My good news."

"Oh. Well, what have you done now?" the innkeeper said. His tone suggested that he had heard his share of good news from this man and was not eager to hear more.

"I've slain a dragon," Fletcher announced in a voice that carried through the entire ground floor of the inn. Two heads popped out of the kitchen, gaped for a moment, then disappeared as Hossel shook his fist at them. The low buzz of conversation at the other table was stilled for a moment, then went on. "Yes, it's true," Fletcher said, gratified by the reception. "I've slain a dragon."

"Where?" Hossel asked.

"At Belford, on the west road. He had just finished his filthy work, and the place was thick with smoke." The conversation at the other table died, and three dirty faces turned toward Fletcher. Hossel leaned against a post and folded his thick arms. Kedrigern felt his interest awakening.

"I didn't notice him right away," Fletcher went on, after a theatrical pause. "My eyes were on the ground, not the sky. I was alert for barbarians. It looked like their handiwork, you understand. Then I saw it — just a speck, far off to the north, very high. It circled the churchyard once, then dropped to rooftop level and came in fast over

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the town. It was heading right for me."

Fletcher glanced around the room. He had them now. The trio at the other table sat open-mouthed. Heads were poked out of the kitchen once again, and Hossel showed no sign of objecting. Even Kedrigern was listening attentively.

"I admit it, friends — I was frightened. Your dragon is no ordinary animal. It can burn you to a crisp before it's within arrow range. But I nocked an arrow and concealed myself behind the ruin of a wall. And as the dragon passed overhead," and here Fletcher sprang up and pantomimed his deed, "I loosed the arrow and took the monster in its heart."

A man at the other table cheered. Fletcher nodded to him graciously.

"How big was it, Fletcher?" Hossel asked.

"The body was about the size of a haywain. Wingtip to wingtip was ... oh, just a bit over the size of the inn, side to side."

"Must have made a terrible crash when it fell," said the man who had cheered.

"Ah, but it didn't fall. Wavered a little, but didn't fall. They never do, you know," said Fletcher knowingly.

"They don't?"

"Of course not. You've never heard of anyone's coming across a dragon's carcass, have you?" Fletcher allowed his little audience a moment to reflect on that fact, then went on: "Once they've taken a death wound, dragons fly north. Up there, beyond the Last Forest and the Glass Mountains, there's a valley where all the dragons go to die. No man has ever laid eyes on it."

"How do you know about it then, cousin?" Hossel asked.

Fletcher turned a cool gaze on him. "I heard it from the wood-witch. She had a vision."

The others exchanged significant glances and nodded solemnly to one another. They had heard Authority cited, and accepted the word without question.

Kedrigern, who had had dealings with the wood-witch, was unimpressed. Considering the stuff she brewed in that cauldron of hers, it was no wonder she had visions. He had drunk a single small bowlful, on a professional visit to her hovel, and been unsteady on his feet for the better part of a week. Visions, indeed.

Fletcher left him, to join the more appreciative trio at the next table, and Kedrigern returned to his ruminations. Nothing remained but to decide on Hossel's punishment, and he would then be on his way. He ran through the customary plagues — rats, mice, fleas, mildew, bad smells — and rejected them. In an establishment like Hossel's Inn, such things would scarcely be noticed. A poltergeist would serve nicely, but poltergeists were troublesome, temperamental things to deal with. But all these measures, he realized, would trouble the guests as much

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as the innkeeper, and Hossel's guests were subjected to suffering enough merely by being here. Kedrigern was not one to punish the innocent with the guilty. A plague of boils seemed to be the solution. Unimaginative, and rather coarse, but under the circumstances as good as he could manage.

He worked the spell, settled his bill, and went to the stable for his horse. A stable boy helped him mount and looked admiringly at the shaggy black steed.

"That's a fine horse, sir," the boy said.

"Yes, he is."

"Looks like a barbarian's horse to me, sir."

"You're very astute, my boy. As a matter of fact, I did get him from a barbarian." Kedrigern thought of Buroc, now no more than a scattering of gravel in a desolate valley. "He had no further use for it."

The stable boy looked about cautiously and with lowered voice asked, "Are you a wizard, sir?"

"What makes you ask that?"

"Why, sir, you look like a wizard. You have the manner of a wizard."

This boy was perceptive, Kedrigern thought. "What makes you so sure I'm not a scholar? Or an alchemist?"

"Oh, you look too bold for a scholar, sir. And too honest for an alchemist," the boy said promptly.

An amazing lad, Kedrigern marveled. Much too clever to be a stable boy. "What do you know of alchemists?"

"Oh, they stop here now and then, sir. A nasty lot they are, too."

A boy of excellent discernment. Reassuring, to find such a bright young lad in these dull and blundering times, when the alchemists seemed to have deceived everyone with their jabber and jargon. "Absolutely right, my boy. Never trust an alchemist," said Kedrigern.

"No, sir. Please, sir...." The stable boy looked up with wide imploring eyes.

"Yes, my boy?"

"Please, sir, would you let me be your apprentice?"

Kedrigern studied him closely. The boy was ragged and filthy. He reeked of the stable. He was very young and probably had no manners at all. On the other hand, he had a keen mind. His eyes were clear and bright, his features more refined than those of the locals, all of whom resembled potatoes.

"Please, sir."

"I'm considering, boy."

An apprentice would be helpful. Not that the burden of work was so great, but wizardry was a lonely business, and an apprentice would be someone with whom he could talk shop. Princess — quite understandably — was chary of all things magical, and Spot, while willing, was hopeless. Too, a fresh young outlook would liven up the house and make things a bit more cheerful for Princess when he was taken up with business.

"All right, my boy. If your master

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agrees, you can come along."

"Hossel's not my master, sir. He lets me sleep in the stable and eat from the kitchen slops, that's all, sir."

"He treats you as a guest, you mean. Very well, then, get your things and follow me."

Kedrigern kept the slowest pace he could, but by midday the boy had fallen far behind. Kedrigern dismounted and sat on a log to wait for him.

"Sorry, master," the boy said, panting, when he caught up.

"It's all right. Sit down. We'll eat something and rest awhile."

When it was time to resume their journey, Kedrigern looked down on the ragged, pinched little figure and was moved to pity. He thought of himself, comfortable on horseback while the lad hurried along the rough road, and felt a twinge of guilt.

"I think it's best if you ride for a bit, boy," he said.

"Oh, no, master! I could never ride while my master walks."

"You must learn to do as I say, boy. If I tell you to ride, you must ride," said Kedrigern sternly.

"If you say so, master," the boy said, springing readily into the saddle.

"And what's your name? I can't keep calling you 'boy'."

"It's Jum, master."

"Jum? Muddy sort of name. Well, let's move on, Jum."

With Kedrigern in the lead, they headed west, to the junction of the great northern highway, and then turned north, toward the mountains. They proceeded in silence. Jum was lost in wonder at his surroundings, craning and swiveling his neck to stare at each unfamiliar sight. He had no breath left for speech, and Kedrigern savored the spectacle of his innocent excitement.

Kedrigern felt more benevolent with each step he took. He had saved a bright, intelligent lad from a lifetime of odorous drudgery in Hossel's stable and won a promising recruit for the wizard's trade. Jum badly needed a scrubbing and a few weeks of hearty food, but he was good raw material. He would require a new name, too, something a bit more dignified. Jum would do for a stable boy, or a jester, or an alchemist — perfect name for an alchemist, he thought — but never a wizard.

They walked on, Jum gawking and Kedrigern ruminating and neither one saying a word, and the landscape around them became gradually more bleak. Here was the blackened ruin of a crofter's hovel, there the wild tangle of a long-abandoned wheatfield. The bleakness soon turned to menace. When he saw a blasted maple hung with a score of corpses in various stages of decomposition, Kedirgern worked a quick early-warning spell. He could not determine who had done all this, but he wanted to know if they were nearby.

"Is that the doing of barbarians,

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master?" Jum asked in a subdued voice.

"It is. But whether it's the work of the eastern lot or our local product, I can't say. It might also be the outcome of a holy war, or a persecution. Or perhaps a family feud. Or the penalty for tax evasion. They all seem to come out the same in the end," Kedrigern said, sighing.

"Rotten barbarians ... ought to skin them all alive!" Jum said with great vehemence.

Kedrigern was about to reprimand the boy, but he checked his tongue. Jum was young and had plenty of time to learn restraint. His outburst might well be the fruit of some personal tragedy, and it would be cruel to silence him.

A league further on, they passed another small farm, burned to stubble, and two leagues beyond that, the smoking remains of an inn. Kedrigern felt a warning tingle in the back of his neck and looked all around. It was Jum who spotted the danger. Kedrigern heard his cry, followed his pointing finger, and saw a dot in the sky, approaching them at great speed.

Kedrigern drew out his medallion and raised it, to peer through the aperture of true vision at its center. He saw a dragon. It was not the size of a haywain, and its 'wingspan was not the length of Hossel's Inn, and it was very old; but it was a dragon, all the same. It was very angry. An arrow had transfixed its left foreclaw, causing considerable pain, but no loss of mobility or power.

"So much for Fletcher the dragonslayer," said Kedrigern, replacing the medallion and rubbing eyes.

"Is it a dragon, master?" Jum cried.

"It is, Jum. Don't worry. We have protection."

"Kill it, master! Kill the dragon!"

"That's not my line of work, Jum."

"But a dragon, master! They only exist to be slain!"

"That will be enough, Jum," said Kedrigern severly.

The boy fell silent. Kedrigern worked a simple spell against flame and smoke, and then, stepping back and laying a calming hand on the horse's neck he awaited the arrival dragon.

It came straight for them, dropping to treetop level as it closed, and when it was within range, it spewed forth a burst of flame. Jum cried out in fear, but the flames rolled to either side without singeing a hair of their heads or a thread of their garments.

The dragon soared sharply, made a tight banking turn, and came at their flank. Again its flame was rendered harmless to the three stationary figures, although it devastated what little of the inn was still standing. After the failure of its second aerial pass, the dragon landed gingerly a short distance away, wincing as its injured claw touched the ground. Inhaling deeply, it poured out a rolling ribbon of flame that completely encircled

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them. Jum howled, the horse whinnied; Kedrigern stood firm; they were unscathed. The dragon took one look at them and drooped. Laying its head on the charred ground, it began to cry.

Kedrigern stepped forward and halted a few paces from the dragon's head. His command of dragon was limited. So he spoke in his own language, low and reassuring, as one would address a large strange dog. "It's all right, old fellow. I'm not an enemy," he said.

The dragon raised its head slightly, blinked, studied him. At that moment, Jum cried, "Kill it, master! Kill it!" Kedrigern snapped, "Shut up, Jum!" and the dragon burst out weeping anew.

"I really mean it. I'm not your enemy," Kedrigern said, stepping closer.

"False-speaker to Fingard
In mendacious man-language!
Villainy of varlet
Has injured by arrow-point,
Now stranger comes stalking
To deal dastardly death-blow,"
rumbled the dragon mournfully.

"I don't do that sort of thing, Fingard. I'm a wizard, not a dragon-slayer," Kedrigern said.

Fingard raised its brassy head. "Wizard?"

"I'm Kedrigern of Silent Thunder Mountain. Surely you've heard of me. Then again ... you're a long way from home, aren't you?"

"Fingard the far-faring
Misses misty mountaintops,
Glittering of glaciers,
Bluster of blizzards."

"Yes, I thought you'd be a northern dragon. The alliteration is a dead giveaway," Kedrigern said.

Fingard raised its head still higher, until its slitted golden-green eyes were level with Kedrigern's. The wizard returned the chilling gaze steadfastly, one hand behind his back, ready to work a quick supporting spell if the need arose. The dragon again addressed him.

"Is wizard all word-skill,
Proud without proof,
Or can he heal arrow-hurt,
Fix Fingard's foreclaw?"

"I'll want some assurances first, Fingard. I'm not going to heal you so you can fly around burning homes and farms," Kedrigern replied.

The dragon raised its injured claw and placed it on its breast. Holding its head high, it intoned,

"Fingard the falsely accused
Denies foul farm-firing,
House-harm and people-hurt!
Swears by Fafnir, far-famed fire-father,
Dean of all dragons,
That burning and butchery
Were work of wicked warriors."

Kedrigern was not entirely surprised to hear this. With so much fire and pillage going on in the world, it was all too easy to lay the blame on dragons. Still, appearances were against Fingard. Its recent intentions

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had certainly not been friendly.

Jum cried shrilly, "Liar, liar! The thing's lying, master! Blast it with a bolt of power! Shrivel it up to a pair of slippers! Destroy it!"

"Be quiet, Jum," Kedrigern commanded. Turning to the dragon, he asked, "Why did you attack us just now, if you're so peace-loving?"

Fingard's head sagged until it hovered just off the ground. The golden-green eyes filmed over as the dragon pondered the question. Its reply came in a subdued, shame-filled bass.

"Fingard forgot himself,
Had tiny temper-tantrum."

His voice hard, his manner severe, Kedrigern demanded, "And did you have a tiny temper-tantrum at Belford, too?"

"In full faith, Fingard
Swears solemly by Fafnir:
I burned no barns at Belford,
Scorched no citizens,
Charred no children!
Simply went sightseeing,
Flew over forests and farmland
Until arrow came unexpected,
Hit home and hurt like hell.
Now wizard knows well
The cause of this confusion—
Has Fingard found friendship?
Is healing help at hand?" the dragon replied.

"Yes, I think I can do something for you. But I want to settle on my payment first," said Kedrigern.

When it responded, the dragon's deep rumbling voice had shrunk to the fawning whine of a street beggar. Its color faded, its head drooped, its eyes grew moist.

"The finances of Fingard are fragile,
Though gold-greedy gossips
Spread rumors of riches,
Musty mounds of precious metals,
Hoary heaps of high-piled treasure.
Fingard, in fact,
Guards gaudy geegaws:
Sits on scant silver,
A jumble of junk jewelry
And rust-rotted armor...
Dire days, these for dragons."

Kedrigern raised his hands and shook his head. "No need to explain about your treasure-hoard, Fingard. I know how you dragons are. What I want from you is blood."

"Blood?" rumbled the dragon, its voice deeper and more resounding than ever.

"Blood. You'll lose a bit when I remove the arrow, anyway. And I also want your solemn promise, no more temper-tantrums when you're around people."

"Blood?!" Fingard roared, arching its neck high to glare down on the wizard.

"All right, stop showing off. If you want the arrow out, it will cost you two vials of blood. And you'll have to swear by Fafnir and Ladon, and Nidhogg, that you'll control your temper whenever you're within ten leagues of

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human beings. Take it or leave it, Fingard," said Kedrigern.

With a thin, steamy sigh, Fingard lowered its head and held out the arrow-pierced forclaw, meanwhile intoning the solemn oath prescribed by the wizard. As Kedrigern examined the wound, the dragon winced, shut its eyes, and began to mumble gloomily.

"Still same sad story:
One man makes misery,
Another pockets profits
From injury to innocent," it said.

"Stop feeling sorry for yourself, Fingard," said the wizard, preoccupied with his examination. He cut off the arrowhead, gripped the shaft, and said, "This may sting a bit. Don't get excited and start flaming and smoking, do you hear?"

"Fingard will show fortitude,
Suffer in silence, smokeless."

"See that you do. Ready?" Kedrigern gripped the arrow shaft in one hand, the scaly foreclaw in the other, and jerked the arrow free. Fingard emitted a little puff of steam, but no smoke or flame. "Thank you for not smoking," Kedrigern said, and proceeded to collect his fee and bind up the wound.

Fingard, subdued, muttered its thanks, unfurled its wings with the crackle of pennants in a strong wind, and took its leave. As the dragon flapped off into the evening sky, Kedrigern turned to his apprentice. Jum sat watching him, a dour expression on his face.

"Well, I hope you learned something today, Jum," Kedrigern said.

"Dragon lover!" the boy cried hatefully.

"Now, see here, Jum—"

"You're soft on dragons! You healed that monster, and you should have killed it!"

"Wizards are not dragon-slayers. We may, on occasion, have to do in another wizard, or a swordsman, or a fiend, in self-defense, but we do not wantonly kill innocent dragons. If you can't get that through your angry little head, you'll never be a wizard."

"I don't want to be a dirty dragon-loving wizard!"

Kedrigern closed his eyes and took a deep breath to calm himself. In a cold, level voice he said, "All right, then, Jum. Get off the horse. If you run, you can be back at Hossel's Inn by nightfall. Perhaps you'll be happier there."

"I will! I will!" the boy cried defiantly. "They're not a bunch of dragon-healers like you!" He dropped to the ground and stood glaring at Kedrigern for a moment. Then his expression softened; his eyes filled with tears; and he rushed to the wizard, weeping, and threw his arms around Kedrigern's waist. "Please, master, forgive me," he blubbered. "I hate dragons. I can't help it, master."

"I understand, my boy. You'll be happier apprenticed to a swordsman, I'm sure," Kedrigern said, patting Jum's head.

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"Am I forgiven, master?" the boy asked, turning up his tear-streaked face.

"Of course you are, Jum."

"And you'll not send a punishing spell after me, ever? Do you promise you won't do that to me, master?"

"Of course, Jum. No punishing spells."

"Then I'd best be on my way," said the boy, stepping back and wiping his eyes and nose on a filthy sleeve. "Good day, sir. Remember, now, no punishing spells."

"I'll remember, Jum. And don't worry about traveling. I'll see that you get to the inn safely."

"Thank you, sir." said the boy, turning to set off down the road.

Kedrigern mounted and headed north at a brisk pace. He wanted to put the burnt inn and all that had happened there out of his sight and memory. For some inexplicable reason, he was feeling uncomfortable.

Clearly, the boy had not been cut out for wizardry, and the sooner he learned that, the better. Kedrigern had actually done him a great service by sending him off. Why, then, did he feel guilty? Why had he extravagantly promised a spell of protection *en route*? Such things cost good magic.

And why had the lad been so apprehensive? Was he such an ogre that small children feared punishing spells for a single angry outburst? It was a sobering thought. Kedrigern had come to think of himself as a kindly man, a loving husband, good with trolls and children, trusted by dragons; yet Jum had feared his anger. It was puzzling and unsettling. He decided that he would not mention a word of this at home.

He consoled himself by thinking of the profits of this trip. Vosconu's wine would improve the ambience of dinners for a long time to come, and he also had the two vials of dragon's blood. As an ingredient in advanced spell-making, they were worth ten times the value of Vosconu's entire vineyard. And aside from his expenses at Hossel's Inn, the trip had cost him nothing.

Absently, he reached down for his purse. It was not in his belt. He patted his belt all around, then his pockets, then the recesses of his garments. No purse. He reined in the horse, dismounted, searched himself and his saddlebags thoroughly, even removed his boots and turned them upside-down. No purse.

Kedrigern remounted and was about to retrace his way when the truth burst upon him. The tearful embrace. The carefully extracted promise of no punishing spell. The sudden willingness to be off and away. And he, like a great booby, had even volunteered a safe-passage spell for the mean little sneak. Well, we would see about that, he thought darkly.

He turned to face south, extended his hand — and remembered his promise. There was no going back on it. He

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sat for a moment, fuming in silence, then flicked the reins and resumed his northern journey.

Good riddance to Jum. The whole idea of an apprentice — and it was all Jum's idea — was preposterous. Very few of the brotherhood had ever taken on an apprentice, and the ones who had were continually complaining about them. One could always summon up temporary help when it was needed, and be sure it was first-quality help. No such guarantee with an apprentice, not these days. If Jum was serious about an apprenticeship, let him sign on with an alchemist. He was a fine prospect: he already knew how to lie and steal.

By the time he had gone a few leagues, Kedrigern was his old self again. His only remaining annoyance was over the promise of no punishing spell. One should not be able to steal from a wizard and escape scot-free. It was a bad precedent to set, and worse still, if the brotherhood learned of it, they would never let him live it down.

His head came up and his eyes brightened when he realized that the promise referred only to Jum. Well, of course he would do nothing to the boy. A wizard's word was inviolable, and he had promised no punishing spell. But he had not said a word about the purse or its contents.

He rode on, smiling, humming a little tune to himself as he weighed the possibilities. It was amazing what one could fit into a purse with just a single small nonpunishing spell.

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to his eyes, twirling the focusing screw experimentally. In a squeaky voice that Dafydd had not heard before, he said, "Charmers? I can't see no charmers." He brought the lenses to bear directly on Dafydd's face. "Maybe a blotty fairy what a feller might wangle three wishes out of, but

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charmers — never!"

Dafydd grinned. He got up from the bed, squeezing the old man's shoulder. "See you on Moelfre tomorrow. I'll try not to be late, but Ceinwen Thomas will be looking for a lot of explanations!"

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Barbara Paul ("The Seven Deadly Sessions," January 1981) returns with an inventive and suspenseful tale about a military stand-off in deep space.

Scarecrow Duty

BY

BARBARA PAUL

I'm not so quick to sneer at stereotypes as I once was. They have their uses. They give us easy targets to shoot at. They provide behavior models to fall back on in times of stress. They offer prepackaged answers when the questions are so idiotic you can't believe someone actually asked them.

"What's with Gropius?" One such question.

"Oh, you know — the military mind." The stereotypical answer.

It explained everything, and nothing. It didn't quite explain why we were going to die.

"The first time I heard him give that I-yam-der-boss speech," Hjalmar said, "I knew he'd do something stupid."

Yeah. We all did.

The ship had never seemed more fragile. A space-suspended shell packed with noncombatants, commanded by a lunatic named Colonel Beynon Gropius who should never have been let out of his cage. All he'd had to do was sit on his hands until his tour was over. Couldn't do it; he just had to prove something.

Hjalmar lounged against my console, affecting a nonchalance he couldn't possibly be feeling. I picked up a stylus and started sketching a new warship on the light screen. Taking recourse in the familiar.

Hjalmar glanced at the sketch and shot me a funny look. "You don't think we're going to get to use that, do you?"

"No." I kept on sketching.

The soft bleep that preceded speaker announcements sounded. "This is Captain Lassky. General meeting in the computer gallery in ten minutes. Computer gallery in ten minutes," he repeated.

Hjalmar and I were already in the

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computer gallery. So we didn't need to move. "They'll have to tell us what they found in that scout ship," I murmured, leaning back to get a different perspective on my new design. Not that it mattered: they all came out looking like lizards.

"Inside the scout ship? Ashes," Hjalmar said bluntly. "Nothing can survive smelter guns, Jean."

"Depends on the intensity Gropius used," I answered absently. I added a row of oval turrets across the top of my new warship. A lizard with warts.

People began coming in for the meeting Captain Lassky had called. Lassky was the ship's pilot, a virtual stranger to most of us. He'd assumed command of the mission when Gropius had taken it on himself to fire on the Mizarians. He'd confined Gropius and his aide to their quarters — the only two professional warriors aboard. Lassky himself was a commercial pilot who'd been conscripted for one tour of duty only, just like the rest of us. All the military pilots were needed for the warships.

"There's Gropius," Hjalmar said suddenly. Gropius and his aide, Lieutenant Schuler, were being brought in under guard. The guards were gripping their laser guns tightly, awkwardly; they were ordinary ship's crewmen and no more used to handling weapons than I was.

I pressed the button that erased my warty lizard from the lightscreen; not ferocious-looking enough. "He's come unglued," I said, meaning Gropius.

Colonel Gropius had always had a facial tic under his left eye, but now that whole side of his face was jumping. His eyes were moving constantly, taking us all in, checking us out. Paranoia rampant, persecution on the half-shell. Even his shoulders were twitching. The man was an embarrassment. At his side, Lieutenant Schuler stood as stiff-backed as a recruiting-poster illustration of correct military posture. A very proper little Prussian, idealized echo of his now-disintegrating commander.

Lassky had come in while I was looking at the two military geniuses who'd just thrown away all our lives in one rash move. Lassky moved to the top tier of the gallery where he could be seen as well as heard.

"I want to bring you up to date," he started off. "I notified the flagship immediately, but the earliest we can expect any help is six day-cycles from now. The Mizarians are sure to make their move before then. We're on our own."

"Can we outrun them?" someone asked.

"Afraid not. We might beat their regular warships, but they've also got five scalers out there." Scalers were the fastest ships in the Mizarian fleet; none of our ships — our real ones, that is — even came near them. This eggshell we were in didn't have a chance against a scaler.

"We got the scout ship cooled

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down enough to bring aboard," Captain Lassky went on. "It appears to be a two-man ship. Also, Dr. T'zu found four kneecaps in the mess inside — kneecaps don't burn, turns out. So that means the Mizarians are two-legged, just like us."

That was more than anyone had yet found out about our enemy. No one had ever seen a Mizarian. They weren't Mizarians, of course. We just called them that because when that first encounter took place, forty years ago, the nearest star had been the binary Mizar — Zeta Ursae Majoris. We didn't know what they called us.

"We've changed our C.A.," Lassky said, without much hope in his voice, "I recorded some new voice messages. No answer yet." Nor would there be. C.A. was short for Communication Attempts, radio messages of sufficient length to allow those other "people" to decipher our language. In forty years there'd never been an answer. Either the Mizarians were lousy linguists or they just didn't want to talk to us. Only one thing was certain: they didn't trust us any more than we trusted them.

"There is this," Lassky said. "They must have learned our language by now, even though they don't answer. I told them the firing on their scout ship was an accident and conveyed our deepest apologies. I made it as strong as I could."

Colonel Gropius made a sound of contempt that carried through the whole gallery. First we'd heard from him.

"What's he doing here?" Hjalmar asked loudly.

An expression I couldn't read passed over Lassky's face. "He wouldn't tell me why he fired, not unless he could speak to the assembled company." He ran a hand nervously through his hair. "Now's as good a time as any, I suppose. All right, Gropius, the floor's yours."

"*Colonel* Gropius," Lieutenant Schuler barked, making everybody jump. No question where his loyalties lay.

Gropius started up to the top tier where Lassky stood, followed by Schuler and their guards. The viewscreen that encircled the gallery was running through its automatic sequence: grid diagrams showing the positioning of ships in the Mizarian fleet, long-range shots of the ships themselves — big, spidery-looking things that sent a chill down your back just to look at them. They hadn't moved for a long time, and that in itself was ominous. It was their turn.

Our erstwhile commander had reached a place on the top tier of the gallery where he could look down on the rest of us, a position he patently enjoyed. But he wanted the exact spot where Captain Lassky was standing; he waited until the pilot shrugged and moved aside. Gropius's symbolism was as heavy-handed as everything else about him.

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"First of all," he said, "I want to make it clear that Captain Lassky will be court-martialed for mutiny as soon as we get back."

The man's obtuseness left us speechless. Did he really think we were going to get back?

"We will shortly be taking part in a military engagement," Gropius went on, his speech slurring slightly. "I am the only one on board qualified to direct such a skirmish. Therefore I am resuming command of this mission."

Skirmish. He actually said *skirmish*. The entire company recovered their voices at the same time and started shouting. Gropius had just started a real honest-to-god war and he wasn't going to get away with using words like *skirmish*.

"Quiet!" Schuler bellowed. The noise gradually died away.

"I ordered Lieutenant Schuler to fire on the Mizarian scout ship," Gropius said, "for the purpose of testing their reaction. We're through playing guessing games." Gropius's pupils were jumping in an abnormal way; courage from a pill? "From now on, this war will be conducted according to the rules of proper military tactics. No more feinting and faking. Get used to the idea."

"But that's the very thing we were sent here to *prevent*," someone protested. "Direct engagement was to be avoided at all costs, that's what the orders said."

Gropius's nostrils widened in a face so filled with contempt there was room for nothing else. "That's the kind of pussyfooting approach that got us into this Mexican stand-off in the first place. It's time this war was taken out of the hands of *mittyists* and given back to the soldiers." He made the word sound obscene.

Now, that really burned me. That burned me bad. "It's been the *mittyists*," I said heatedly, "who've kept this war from breaking out for forty years. If it weren't for our illusions, all you soldier-boys would be dead by now."

"You will speak to your Commanding Officer with respect," Schuler told me with ice in his voice. Someone hooted derisively. "Quiet!" he commanded the room at large.

"No, *you* be quiet," I said. "Haven't you two done enough damage? Killing two Mizarians! The first rule of this war is that nobody gets hurt."

"Hold it, Jean," Captain Lassky spoke up. (I was faintly surprised he knew my name.) "Strategy was decided a long time ago — no point in arguing it now. Colonel Gropius, you are still under arrest, you and your aide. You're commanding no military engagements, not from my ship."

Gropius's eyes grew larger and his jaw worked back and forth. Did the man really expect no opposition? "Don't you understand, you fools? The Mizarian fleet is no more real than ours is! Why do you think they've re-

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fused to engage for nearly forty years? Because those pictures of warships we keep projecting are so realistic? Do you think the Mizarians are actually fooled by our phony intership radio communications and fake tracking system blips and all the rest of it? They haven't attacked because they can't! *That's a phantom fleet out there.*"

I heard Hjalmar groaning beside me. It had been a planetside sick joke for as long as I could remember; it tickled some people's sense of the absurd to think of the two races spending all that money to wage war with shadows. But Gropius believed it.

"Why do you think they haven't moved in all this time?" Gropius's voice was getting higher. "It's their turn, yet they just sit there!" I glanced up at the wraparound screen; the spidery Mizarian vessels should have made some move by now, true. Not their regular move this time; we'd changed the rules on them. But something.

All out engagements with the Mizarians were made up of maneuvering for position, *preparing* to fight — but always stopping short at the critical moment. The moves were automated, programmed (on our side) by chess masters. Colonel Gropius had no real place in this kind of war. He had no job to do, no work to perform. He was here only as a symbol of the military's reluctance to relinquish its hold on any ship in the fleet, even one whose maneuvers were directed totally by the computers. It was so mechanical it was boring: our turn, their turn, our turn again. But, thanks to Gropius, we'd made an illegal move in the game, and somehow I didn't think the Mizarians would just pretend not to notice.

Suddenly Hjalmar spoke to Gropius's aide. "Schuler, how can you countenance this? Your C.O. disobeyed a direct order. *You* should have been the one to relieve him of his command — instead of leaving it to Captain Lassky."

"My orders are to assist Colonel Gropius in any way required," Schuler snapped, and said no more. He wasn't going to justify himself to us. To the military, if need be, but not to us.

"You just refuse to face it, don't you?" Hjalmar said with surprising softness. "The Mizarians aren't going to let us turn around and go home — you've condemned us to die. You've started the war we've managed to avoid for *forty years*. None of us is going to survive. Our one ship with its four puny banks of smelter guns against that fleet out there? We—"

"*There is no fleet!*" Gropius screamed. "You're blind, all of you—"

Everyone started yelling again; I was getting a headache. The meeting was deteriorating into a name-calling competition. Captain Lassky shouted for order — and was obeyed by the crew, ignored by the mittyists. Alarmed, he spoke to Gropius's and Schuler's guards — who quickly (and gladly) hustled the two military men out of the

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gallery. Madness, utter madness.

When we'd all calmed down a little, Captain Lassky spoke again. "Maybe the fact that they haven't moved yet is a good sign. They're obviously thinking it over, trying to decide what to do." He ran his hand through his hair again in that same nervous gesture. "They might accept our apology. There's always a chance. They probably don't want this war any more than we do. They might be willing to make a gesture of good will."

Maybe. Personally, I put more faith in fear than in any ostensible good will the Mizarians might show. If we'd done a good job and persuaded them our fleet was real, they might hesitate even now to plunge into an all-out war. Seemed to me the whole thing depended on how convincing the mittyists' illusions were.

"I really don't see there's anything we can do just now," Lassky was saying. "What happens next is up to the Mizarians."

Any hope we might have had that a strong leader would emerge from this mess was pretty much quashed by now. It occurred to me that Lassky must have piloted a cargo ship in private life; he didn't seem to know even the rudimentary soothe-the-frightened-passengers techniques. Lassky was just an ordinary man caught up in an extraordinary situation; we had no right to expect him to be Superman.

Suddenly I had to get out of there. I slipped out of the gallery and went down to my cabin. I lay on my bunk in the dark and then got up again to switch on the screen. The Mizarians were still there. I lay back listening to the thrumming of the ship and watched the spider images on the screen.

About a third of our fleet was real — lizard-shaped warships that were probably just as deadly as anything the Mizarians could turn out. But every mitty ship in the fleet was filled with people like me, professional dream-fabricators who'd had enough success in our work to be scooped up as part of the space fleet — a grand incentive to do good work. We were needed to project into the black of space the illusion of a powerful fleet of hungry lizards just dying to gobble up the Mizarian spiders. A gamble born out of sheer desperation, but so far it had worked. Or the Mizarians were letting us think it had.

Why wouldn't they talk to us? They'd initiated no combat, they'd been content to play the feint-and-retreat game. But they'd refused communication for forty years. To us, the "war" was a temporary holding action that had been going on for nearly half a century. To them, it seemed to be a desired and permanent status quo. Different races, different thinking processes. Another stereotypical stock answer that explained nothing.

"Jean?" Hjalmar stood silhouetted in the open doorway.

I told him to come in.

He stood looking at the changing

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images on the screen. "He's mad, you know. The signs were there, right from the beginning."

"Hindsight, Hjalmar."

He shook his head. "I told one of our briefing officers before we left. I told him Gropius had a screw loose — you can imagine the reception *that* got." He was silent a moment. "Such a glamorized picture he has of himself. Better to reign in hell."

I moved over to make room for him on the bunk. "Well if Gropius sees himself as a fallen angel, he's half right, at least. He's fallen, for sure. He wouldn't be here in the first place unless he were in somebody's bad graces." Command of a mitty ship was considered a come-down for a career military man; in fact, it had taken on a somewhat punitive coloration in the past few years.

Hjalmar stretched out beside me. "It's easy to see why Gropius went round the bend. He's been trained to wage war and then put in a situation where he's forbidden to do the very thing he's been trained to do. It's as if you and I were given years of intensive art instruction and then told we must never pick up a stylus."

Put that way, the surprise wasn't that one commanding officer had cracked but that the others had not.

"But Schuler," Hjalmar went on. "He's the one who doesn't make sense. He goes by the book — but when Gropius throws the book away, Schuler doesn't bat an eye."

I shrugged, not easy to do lying down. "Schuler's one of those people who're comfortable in the military because all their decisions are made for them. It probably didn't even occur to him to question Gropius's order to fire."

"Meddling ignoramuses," Hjalmar said bitterly.

From the moment we went into hyperdrive Gropius and Schuler had made their presence felt on the ship. They interfered in everything — changing our designs, demanding reports, even telling Captain Lassky how to run the ship. They knew nothing of either our work or the crew's, but that didn't stop them. They threw their authority at us every chance they got and made themselves the two most despised people on board. They gave us no help, no leadership, not even a sense of continuity. All they did was get in the way. Gropius must have been more desperate for recognition than we'd realized; why else turn a carefully preserved latent war into an active one?

"They're not going to admit they're superfluous cargo," I said. "Nobody likes being a token authority."

"Two-legged," Hjalmar said, thinking of the Mizarians who had died. "Just like us. You know, I realize there's only one chance in a million that I'll live another full day-cycle — and I don't know how to feel about it. The Mizarians can't let the loss of their scout ship pass without retaliating.

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They'll start firing in earnest at the phantom ships, and sooner or later they'll find us. This floating eggshell we're in won't have a chance. I keep telling myself I'm going to die — but I just can't believe myself."

I knew the feeling. Perhaps that much-vaunted human will to live was nothing more than an inability to face facts. We lay without speaking for a while, and then I said, "They'll fire at the phantom warships first. I doubt their disposition will improve any when they find out they've been fooled all these years. *If* they've been fooled. Hjalmar, do you think they're longer-lived than we are? Could they have some long-range plan in mind...."

I stopped. Hjalmar was snoring lightly. A retreat into sleep; good idea.

I let myself drift off.

I awoke to the sound of the ship's alarm. Hjalmar was standing, blocking the screen. "What is it?"

"The Mizarians are moving," he said. "Come on — let's go to the big screen."

The gallery was packed; even crew members who were not on duty had crowded in. The screen showed the Mizarian grid positions simultaneously with tracking shots of individual ships. The Mizarian move looked like any other move we'd all watched several hundred times before. But of course it wasn't like any other move. This time it was for real.

Then we saw differences: no feinting or jockeying for position this time. Early in the move it became clear they were massing their fleet to converge on a single point. On *us*. They left a defensive perimeter as protection against a flank attack by our other ships (ha, sure, don't hold your breath) — but the rest of their ships were treating our little corner of Heaven as a target with us as the bull's-eye.

"Isn't he going to maneuver, to try to get us out?" a woman standing next to me said.

Presumably "he" was Captain Lassky. "Not much point, is there?" I answered. "They have five scaler ships — we aren't going anywhere."

"He must be thinking our best chance is to roll over on our back with our paws in the air," Hjalmar offered.

"Do you think they know?" the woman asked. "Maybe they've always known."

Nobody answered her. It was a question we all asked ourselves every day of our lives. But the Mizarians had programmed defensive positions into this new move, protecting themselves against an attack that would never come. Either they didn't know ours was a ghost fleet, or for reasons of their own they were still pretending not to know.

"Perhaps they're sadists," Hjalmar said. "This could be what they consider recreation." His voice was perfectly calm as he said that.

The grid patterns showed us we

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were now dead center of a sphere-like mass of slowly orbiting Mizarian ships. They were still too far away to be seen without telescopic scanners. But they were there.

Then one ship pulled away from the mass and headed in toward us. Contact? They were going to try for personal contact? Then why not use the radio? As the Mizarian ship drew nearer, people started leaving the gallery to go watch directly from one of the viewports. Hjalmar went with them; I stayed where I was — the scanners had more viewing angles.

The ship loomed bigger and bigger on the screen. Finally it got as close in as it cared to come and took up a tight orbit around us — an incredible maneuver for a ship that size. One of the close-up scanners showed us a huge open hatch, a gaping mouth ready to take a bite out of our fragile egg.

I realized I was holding my breath and let it out. We were all waiting for some monstrous thing to come out of that open hatchway.

But nothing did. If we were waiting, so were the Mizarians — or so it seemed. But waiting for what?

Of course. They wanted their scout ship back.

My blood started pounding in my head as I realized what it meant. They were offering us a way out. It was so simple.

I elbowed my way though the crowd and out of the gallery. The low thrumming of the ship was all the more noticeable in the emptiness of the dim corridors and the lift chutes. It was ugly, this ship — ugly and functional and *wrong*. This was not my world. I was a wish-fulfiller, a maker of dreams; I had no business being here where violent death was a reality. I'd worked up a rather good case of self-pity before I remembered no one else on this ship belonged here either.

Regulations required me to stand before the bridge cameras until permission to enter was granted. Permission denied.

"It's urgent," I said to whoever was on the other end of the speaker. "I've got to talk to Captain Lassky. There may be a way out of this."

Permission to enter the bridge grudgingly granted.

I'd never been on the bridge; never had a reason to be. I halfway expected a condition of controlled panic, or at least the sight of people moving briskly back and forth doing important things. Instead it was absolutely still, the crew were absolutely silent. Waiting for Lassky to make a decision? Yes.

He was staring at a scanner image of the open-mouthed Mizarian ship and barely spared me a glance. The bridge temperature was a tad on the cool side, but Lassky was sweating.

"They want you to send back their scout," I said without preamble.

"We managed to figure that out," he answered with uncharacteristic sarcasm.

"But not empty."

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He made a gesture of dismissal. "They want the four kneecaps back? That's all that's left of their men. And don't say they don't know what happened to them."

"I wasn't going—"

"They know what happened. There's no way they can think we only captured the scout — they have smelter guns themselves. That ship right there has them. They know their men are dead."

"Yes, that's what—"

"So why do they want the scout back?" he pushed on, thinking out loud. "To keep us from studying it? We've already studied it. During that long wait while they were making up their minds what to do."

"Will you listen?" I finally said. "You've been sending them messages saying it was an accident and that we're sorry. They're giving us a chance to prove we mean what we say. They want us to send them something. The scout ship is just the gift box."

That got his attention. "Send them what? Military secrets, a bribe? We don't even know what they value."

I think he knew right away what to send but was stalling to give himself time to think. "Nothing like that," I said. "Only equal value will do — tit for tat. We took two of their men, we send them two of ours."

Lassky wouldn't look at me; I stared at some neutral spot beyond his left ear. We both knew which two. "I can't believe they'll let us off that easy."

"Depends on whether they really believe our illusions or not," I said. "Only one way to find out."

"There's a risk," he pointed out. "If they've learned our language — and you know damn well they have — they're going to ask questions. Schuler would keep his mouth shut, I'm not worried about him. But the condition Gropius is in — why, he'd spill everything he knows. Once the Mizarians find out we're the only real ship here—"

"I didn't say send them *alive*." I kept silent as he thought about it. We were, after all, talking about killing two men, a drastic step even if it did mean the saving of our own lives. It deserved a moment's meditation. At the same time, I couldn't help wondering at Lassky's excuse-making. Did he really think Schuler wouldn't talk? Anybody can be made to say anything. Anybody.

Lassky was still resisting it. "We'd be giving them a leg up. They'll have two human cadavers to dissect — while we still don't even know what they look like."

"You prefer the alternative?" I asked dryly. A military commander would not only have made the decision by now but already acted upon it. Cargo pilots aren't so quick to kill people, even dangerous people like Gropius and Schuler. And Lassky needed to be quick.

"Jean — go back to the gallery," he finally said. "I want to consult my of-

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ficers." I started to go, but he put out a hand to stop me, looking at me with something very close to dislike. "Do you make a practice of thinking up dirty work for others to do?"

I waited a moment. "I see no reason to die because of other people's stupidity. Gropius and Schüler created the circumstances of their own destruction," I added, feeling pompous.

He dropped his hand and let me go.

When I got to the gallery, Hjalmar was seated at my station, calling up some of my designs from the computer's memory. "Got tired of looking at my own," he explained as he slid over to make room for me.

He didn't ask where I'd been, and I didn't volunteer anything. We didn't talk much, just sat there and waited. Everybody was waiting. Even the Mizarians; I hoped Lassky wouldn't delay too long.

Finally the screen showed what I'd been wanting to see. A murmur ran through the gallery as the burnt-out scout ship, now powered by three of our rockets attached to the hull, sped toward the open-mouthed Mizarian ship. The scout disappeared inside the larger ship; the hatch slid closed.

The pre-announcement bleep sounded; Lassky had decided to wait until after the fact to explain. "We've returned the scout ship to the Mizarians," the captain said. "The bodies of Colonel Gropius and Lieutenant Schuler are aboard the scout. We're hoping the Mizarians will accept two of our men as repayment for the loss of two of theirs. Tit for tat." A stunned silence followed this announcement; Lassky was giving everyone time to take it in. Then he said: "I accept full responsibility for this act and its consequences."

A little bravado there toward the end, but so what? Didn't hurt anything.

"We've balanced the scales now," Lassky went on. "That may be enough. If you know any prayers, now's the time to trot 'em out." And on that flippant note his deadly serious announcement ended. Our captain was disturbed.

Hjalmar was staring at me in disbelief. "Did he say the *bodies* of Schuler and Gropius?"

"That's what he said," I agreed.

He shook his head. "Whew." Hjalmar wasn't hypocrite enough to add *poor devils* or some other falsely commiserating phrase.

Nothing to do now but wait and see whether the Mizarians were satisfied or not. In a way, this waiting was harder than the waiting we'd done when death seemed a certainty. Not knowing whether you've done the right thing, not having an answer — sheer torture.

It was what had pushed Gropius over the edge. Military commanders like conclusive actions, but that need for certainty isn't limited to the military. What did the Mizarians want, how much did they understand, why

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were they playing at tippy-toe war with us? For forty years we'd been kept in the dark, and the strain was beginning to tell. Few of us possess what an old poet called "negative capability" — the capacity to live with unanswered questions, unresolved paradoxes. Our blessing and our curse.

Gropius had lived with too much uncertainty for too long — uncertainty about the war, about his own place in it. It was the sheer human need for an answer that had pushed him into taking action. Gropius was one of those people for whom a wrong answer is better than no answer at all.

"There they go," Hjalmar said excitedly. The screen grid showed the Mizarian ships pulling back; we were no longer a bull's-eye. The Mizarians took up their original positions, and then after a slight pause began to move again. But this time it was one of their recognizable maneuvers in our forty-year-old chessmatch.

The game had resumed.

Pandemonium broke loose in the gallery. A few loud cheers here and there but mostly high, near-hysterical laughter. I could hear a few people crying. They were acting, in short, exactly the way you'd expect people to act who'd just found out they weren't going to die after all.

I turned to Hjalmar; his face was glistening with sweat and his whole body was trembling. "*Now* I know how to feel about it," he laughed apologetically. "I didn't realize how scared I was."

Captain Lassky came on the speaker — a cheerful Lassky this time. I missed most of what he said because of the hubbub around me. One phrase I caught: "Business as usual."

"What a way to make the history books," Hjalmar mock-groaned in relief. "The first casualities of the war, and they have to happen on *our* tour. What rotten luck."

I didn't agree. On the whole, I thought we were damned lucky. What if we'd had a pilot who was so intimidated by his own lack of experience that he'd frozen at the moment he'd needed to act? And what if we didn't just happen to have on board two totally superfluous men whom nobody liked anyway? Who would play sacrificial goat then? What if instead of two dangerous fools we'd had to send two warm, wonderful, compassionate human beings to the Mizarians? What if we'd had to send two of *us*?

I picked up a stylus and started sketching a new lizard on the lightscreen.

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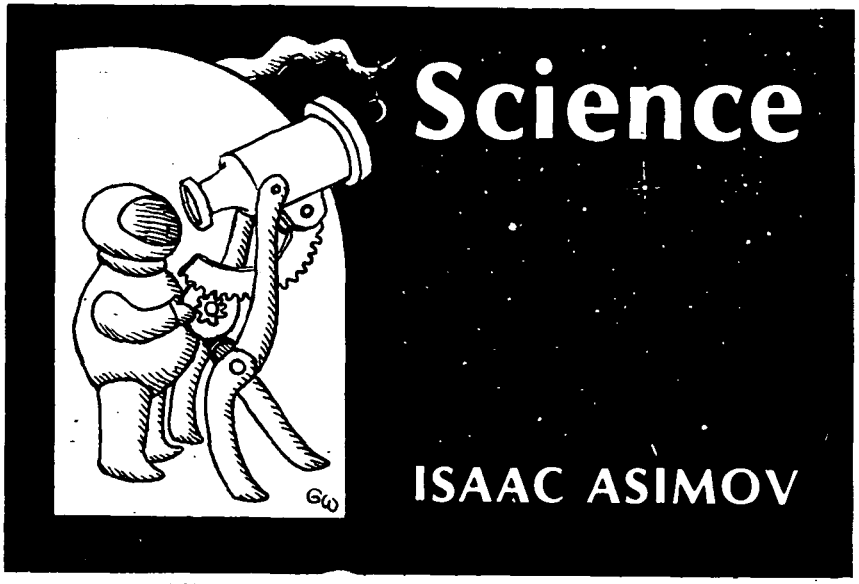

Drawing by Gahan Wilson

WHATZISNAME'S ORBIT

I have just returned from the Institute on Man and Science at Rensselaerville, New York, where, for the ninth successive year, I helped conduct a seminar on a science-fictional subject. This time it was on space treaties.

How, for instance, do we regulate the use of the limited space in a geosynchronous orbit, considering that that is where it would make the most sense to place a solar power station?

Speaking was my good friend, Mark Chartrand, who is now the head of the National Space Institute. On several occasions, he referred to the geosynchronous orbit as the "Clark orbit."

I was puzzled, and finally I spoke up. "Why the Clark orbit?" I asked. "Who's Clark?"

Chartrand stared at me for a moment, and said, "The reference is to Arthur C. Clarke. Surely you have heard of him, Isaac."

There was loud laughter, naturally, and when it died down, I said, indignantly, "Well, how the heck was I supposed to know you were referring to Arthur? You didn't pronounce the silent "e" in his name."

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Would you believe that no one considered that an adequate excuse?

The point is (and it is something I very well knew) that, way back in 1948, Arthur Clarke had discussed the possibility of placing communications satellites in orbit, and had described the particular usefulness of having them in geosynchronous orbit. This was the first time the point had been made, I believe, and so "Clarke orbit" is a perfectly justified term.

To make up for my failure to recognize Arthur's name when I heard it, let's go into the Clarke orbit in detail.

Suppose we consider various objects revolving about the Earth at various distances from its center. The farther an object is from Earth, the longer the orbit through which it must sweep, and, at the same time, the more slowly it must travel, since the intensity of Earth's gravitational field decreases with distance.

The period of revolution, depending as it does, upon both the length of the orbit and upon the orbital speed, increases with distance, in a way that is slightly complicated.

Thus, imagine a satellite skimming about the Earth no more than 150 kilometres above its surface, or (which is the same thing) about 6,528 kilometres from its center. Its period of revolution is just about 87 minutes.*

The Moon, on the other hand, revolves about the Earth at a mean distance of 384,401 kilometres from Earth (center to center). Its sidereal period of revolution (that is, its revolution relative to the stars, which is the closest we can get to the concept of its "real" revolution) is 27.32 days. The Moon is 58.19 times as far from Earth's center as the satellite is, but the Moon's period or revolution is 452 times as long as the satellite's is.

The period, it would seem, lengthens more quickly than the distance does, but less quickly than the square of the distance does. We can put this mathematically by calling the ratio of the periods of revolution as P and the ratio of distances as D, and saying that $P > D^1$ and $P < D^2$, where $>$ means "is greater than" and $<$ means "is less than." As it turns out, $P = D^{1.5}$.

An exponent of 1.5 means that to get the period of the farther object you must take the cube of the ratio of the distances and then take the square root of the result. Thus, the Moon is 58.9 times as far from the Earth as the satellite is. Therefore, let us take the cube of that ratio: 58.9 X 58.9 X

**All moving objects in this essay are assumed to be moving in a prograde direction (west-to-east), the direction of Earth's rotation.*

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58.9 = 204,336, and then take the square root of that, which is 452. That is the ratio of the periods of revolution. If you multiply the satellite's period by 452, you will get the Moon's period. Or you can begin with the sidereal period of the Moon, divide that by 452 and get the period of the asteroid. Or, beginning with the ratio of the periods, you can get the ratio of the distances.

All this is Kepler's "third law," and now we can forget about the mathematics. I'll do the calculating and you can take my word for it.*

The Earth turns on its axis, relative to the stars (the "sidereal day") in 23 hours 56 minutes. The Earth's sidereal day is longer than the period of revolution of the satellite skimming its surface and shorter than the period of revolution of the Moon.

As we imagine a series of objects revolving about the Earth in orbits that are farther and farther away from the planet's center, the period of revolution will grow longer and longer, and at some distance between that of the satellite (where the period is too short) and that of the Moon (where it is too long) there will be a place where a satellite will have a sidereal period of revolution exactly equal to that of Earth's sidereal period of rotation.

Such a satellite is moving in a geosynchronous orbit, "geosynchronous" being from Greek words meaning "moving in time with the Earth."

Using Kepler's third law, we can find out exactly where a satellite must be in order to be in a geosynchronous orbit.

It turns out that a satellite, revolving about the Earth at a mean (that is, average) distance of 42,298 kilometres from Earth's center, will revolve in precisely 1 sidereal day. Such a satellite will be located 35,919 kilometres above the Earth's surface (which is itself 6,378 kilometres from Earth's center).

If you feel uncomfortable with metric measurements, by the way, you can always convert kilometres to miles by dividing the number of kilometres by 1.609. You will then find out that a satellite in geosynchronous orbit is located at a mean distance of 22,324 miles above the Earth's surface.

If a satellite is in geosynchronous orbit, it might seem to you that it would move just in time with the Earth's rotation and it would therefore seem to remain in the sky in the same spot, day and night, for an indefinite period, if you're watching it (with a telescope, if necessary) from Earth's surface.

**Those of you with nasty, suspicious minds will, I'm sure, check my calculations and catch me in arithmetical or conceptual errors.*

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Not quite!

A satellite is in geosynchronous orbit at a mean distance of 42,298 kilometres from Earth's center, in whatever its plane of revolution might be. It might turn about the Earth from west to east (or east to west, for that matter), following a track above the Equator. Or it might turn about the Earth from north to south (or from south to north) passing over both poles. Or it might be in any oblique orbit in between. All would be geosynchronous orbits.

If you were standing on Earth's surface, watching a satellite in geosynchronous orbit in a plane that formed an angle to Earth's equator, you would see its position change with reference to the zenith.

The satellite would mark out, in the course of a day, a figure-eight, which astronomers call an "analemma." The greater the angle the orbit forms with the Equator, the larger the analemma.

As an example, the Sun moves across the sky in an apparent orbit that is at an angle to the Earth's equator. For that reason, the position of the noon-day Sun in the sky shifts from day to day. It marks out an analemma and, on a large globe, a proportionate analemma is usually placed in the empty spaces of the Pacific Ocean. From this analemma you can tell exactly how high in the sky the noon day sun is on any day of the year (provided you adjust it to the latitude of the place where you are standing) and also exactly how many minutes the noonday Sun is short of the zenith meridian or past the zenith meridian on any day of the year. (It is *at* the zenith meridian on April 15 and August 30.)

This behavior of the Sun had to be allowed for in the old days of sundials, and "analemma" is, in fact, the Latin word for the block supporting a sundial.

A geosynchronous orbit need not be a perfect circle. It can be an ellipse of any eccentricity. It remains geosynchronous as long as the *mean* distance is correct. It can come in closer at one end of its orbit and retreat farther at the other end.

If, however, the orbit is elliptical as well as oblique, then the analemma is not symmetrical. One loop of the figure eight will be larger than the other. The more elliptical the orbit the greater the disparity in the size of the loops.

Thus, the Earth moves about the Sun in an ellipse of some slight eccentricity, so that the analemma formed by the apparent position of the noon-day Sun from day to day in the course of the year is asymmetric. The northern loop is smaller than the southern, which is why the noon-day Sun is at the zenith meridian about three weeks after the northern vernal

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equinox and three weeks before the northern autumnal equinox. If Earth's orbit were circular, the analemma would be symmetrical and the noon-day Sun would be at the zenith meridian on the equinoxes.

Suppose, though, that a satellite is revolving about the Earth in Earth's equatorial plane. The orbit would form an angle of 0° with the Equator and the analemma would be squashed to nothingness in the north-south direction.

If, however, the satellite were revolving in the equatorial plane in an ellipse, it would move faster than its mean speed in that part of its orbit where it was closer to the Earth than its mean distance, and slower than it was in the other portion. Part of the time if would outrace Earth's surface, and the rest of the time it would lag behind.

Viewed from the surface of the Earth, such a satellite would mark out a straight line, east and west, completing the back and forth motion in the course of a day. The more pronounced the eccentricity of the orbit, the longer the line.

But suppose that a satellite were not only revolving in Earth's equatorial plane, but were doing so in a perfect circle, west-to-east. In that case, the analemma would be totally degenerate. The motion north-and-south and the motion east-and-west would both disappear, and the satellite, when viewed from the Earth, would seem completely motionless. It would hang over one spot of the Earth indefinitely.

There is the difference between a geosynchronous orbit and a Clarke orbit. There are an infinite number of geosynchronous orbits, with any value of orbital inclination and orbital eccentricity. There is, however, only *one* Clarke orbit.

A Clarke orbit is a geosynchronous orbit with an orbital inclination of zero and an orbital eccentricity of zero. A Clarke orbit is exactly circular and exactly in the equatorial plane, and its value is precisely this: *Only* in a Clarke orbit will a satellite be motionless with respect to the Earth's surface.

This can be very useful. A satellite, motionless with respect to Earth's surface, will offer the simplest situation with respect to relaying communications, or to beaming energy. It was such an orbit Clarke visualized in his 1948 paper, hence "Clarke orbit."

Since there is only one Clarke orbit, and it is fairly close to the Earth, it represents a sharply limited resource. The length of the orbit is 265,766 kilometres — only 6.6 times the length of the circumference of the Earth (because the Clark orbit is only 6.6 times as far from Earth's center as Earth's surface).

Suppose you wanted to put a series of solar power stations in the Clarke orbit, and suppose it turns out that you can't really expect perfection. You

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can't place a satellite into the Clarke orbit *exactly*, and even if you could the gravitational perturbations of the Moon and the Sun would force it to jiggle about a bit. It might turn out, then, that safety would require placing the power stations at intervals of 1,000 kilometres. In that case, we could only squeeze 265 of them into the Clarke orbit, and that would present us with a limit to the amount of energy we could bleed from the Sun.

If there are other types of satellites that we would want in the Clarke orbit — communications satellites, navigational satellites, and so on — that would limit things even further.

One could imagine a particularly long satellite, with its long axis parallel to the Clarke orbit. Different types of functions could be placed along its length, and these would never interfere with each other, for the satellite would move as a unit. The power stations at the two ends would not move relative to each other, or relative to the communications and navigational functions that might exist in between. In that way, a far greater number of working units could be squeezed into the Clarke orbit.

One might even picture a solid ring that filled the Clarke orbit, the sort of thing Larry Niven pictured in *Ringworld*. In that case, we could have functions of all sorts thickly strewn all along it. Such a ring is metastable however; that is, it would remain stably in orbit only as long as Earth remained in the exact center of the ring. If anything happened to nudge the ring slightly to one side (through gravitational perturbations, for instance) so that the Earth was no longer in the precise center of the ring, it would continue to drift in that same direction, would break up through tidal action, and parts would crash to Earth.

But then, there could be orbits related to the Clarke orbit that have values of their own.

Imagine a satellite in a cirular orbit in the equatorial plane at a distance where its period of revolution is exactly *two* sidereal days, or three, or one and a half. A period of two sidereal days would mean that the satellite would move steadily, rising in the east and setting in the west but from any point on the Equator it would be seen directly overhead at 48-hour intervals. Other periods that were simply related to the sidereal day would present their own patterns. (Even geosynchronous orbits that were inclined and eccentric and were therefore not Clarke orbits might be so arranged as to present simple patterns of behavior in the sky.)

I'm not sure what uses such patterns would have but they would be interesting from the standpoint of celestial mechanics. Let us refer to the whole family of orbits with inclination and eccentricity of zero as "Clarke

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orbits" regardless of distance and period of revolution. *The* Clarke orbit, where a satellite has a period of 1 sidereal day would be a "Clarke-1 orbit". One in which the period was 2 sidereal days would be a "Clarke-2 orbit" and so on. We have the following distances from Earth's center then:

Orbit	*Distance (kilometres)*
Clarke-½	26,648
Clarke-1	42,298
Clarke-1½	55,410
Clarke-2	67,127
Clarke-3	87,980
Clarke-4	106,591
Clarke-5	123,679

The farther out such an orbit, the greater the effect of Lunar perturbations upon it. I'm not enough of a celestial mechanic to be able to work out where a Clarke orbit would become large enough for perturbations to prevent its being useful for this purpose or that, but in time to come there will no doubt be computer simulations that will supply the answer — if such things don't already exist.

What works for Earth would work for any other astronomical body. Suppose, for instance, we wanted to place a satellite in orbit about Mars in such a way that it would seem to hover in one place in the sky as seen from the Martian surface. (Perhaps we would want continuous photographs of a particular spot on Mars over an extended period of time — as far as the inevitable interference of night, and of occasional dust-storms, would permit.)

In the case of Mars, no geosynchronous orbit is possible, if we take our Greek seriously, since "geo-" applies only to Earth. You would have to speak of an "areosynchronous orbit". (I know, I know; people will speak of a geosynchronous orbit anyway, just as they casually say "lunar geology", when they really mean "selenology".)

Yet you can always speak of a Clarke orbit for any world. That is not tied, etymologically to the Earth. You can define a Clarke orbit as one in which an object will move about a larger object, with an orbital inclination and orbital eccentricity of zero, and with a period equal to the sidereal period of rotation of the larger object.

The question, then, is what is the distance from the center of Mars to *its* Clarke orbit.

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The Martian sidereal day is a bit longer than Earth's, since Mars rotates, relative to the stars, in 24.623 hours. This would have the effect of increasing the distance of the Clarke orbit, compared to that of the Earth, since the satellite need travel more slowly to keep up with the Martian rotation.

On the other hand, the intensity of the Martian gravitational field is only a tenth that of Earth's, so that the Clarke orbit would have to be closer to Mars if the satellite is going to be forced to circle Mars in a little over twenty-four hours. It is this second effect which is the greater, so that the Clarke orbit for Mars is at a distance of 20,383 kilometres from Mars's center.

Mars's Clarke orbit is just about half as far away from Mars as Earth's Clarke orbit is from Earth.

The farther Martian satellite, Deimos, is at a distance of 23,500 kilometres from Mars, and so is just outside the Clarke orbit. It therefore moves about Mars in slightly more than a Martian sidereal day; in 1.23 Martian sidereal days to be exact.

Any object lying outside the Clarke orbit (if we continue to assume all revolutions and rotations to be in the prograde direction, from west to east) will rise in the east and set in the west as viewed from the surface of the world it revolves about. This is true of Deimos, which rises in the Martian east and sets in the west, though it appears to move very slowly, since the Martian surface, as it rotates, nearly keeps up with it.

Mars' inner satellite, Phobos, has an orbit that lies *within* the Clarke orbit, since it is at a distance of only 9,350 kilometres from the center of Mars. It therefore revolves about Mars in less than a Martian sidereal day (0.31 such days, in fact) and overtakes the Martian surface.

Any object lying inside a Clarke orbit would appear to rise in the west and set in the east as viewed from the world about which the orbit exists — and that is indeed true of Phobos.

Jupiter is a particularly interesting case. It has an enormously intense gravitational field, one that is 318 times that of the Earth, and it also has a particularly fast rotation, making one complete turn on its axis in but 9.85 hours.

At what distance from Jupiter, then, would a satellite have to be in order to move about it in 9.85 hours? The answer is that Jupiter's Clarke orbit is at a distance of 158,500 kilometres from Jupiter's center. That is nearly four times the distance of Earth's Clarke orbit from Earth's center, despite the fact that a satellite moving about Jupiter must complete its circle in only 2/5 the time a satellite in Earth's Clarke orbit must if it is to maintain synchronicity.

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Remember, though, that 158,500 kilometres represents the distance from Jupiter's *center*. Jupiter is a large, fat planet, however, and its equatorial surface is 71,450 kilometres from its center. This means that a satellite in a Clarke orbit about Jupiter would be only 87,050 kilometres above the visible surface of Jupiter's cloud-layer.

Imagine, then, a satellite placed into a Clarke orbit about Jupiter, in such a way that it is right above the Great Red Spot. What a continuous view it would have, during the five hours of daylight.

It could watch five hours on and five hours off for quite a long period of time, though there would be some complications. First, the Great Red Spot moves rather erratically and wouldn't stay underneath the satellite indefinitely. Second, Jupiter's intense magnetic field might interfere with the satellite's workings. Third, we now know that Jupiter has a ring of debris close to its Clarke orbit and that might interfere, too.

Nevertheless, the sight would be a magnificent one if it could be managed, and since I have never heard of this being talked of (though that doesn't mean it hasn't been), I can at least dream that someday this *particular* Clarke orbit may be called the Asimov orbit.

Saturn, which, compared to Jupiter, has a slightly longer period of rotation (10.23 hours) and a considerably less intense gravitational field, has a Clarke orbit at a distance of 109,650 kilometres, or only 49,650 kilometres above Saturn's cloud layer.

There is one serious catch here, however, the gigantic ring system of Saturn lies in the planet's equatorial plane so that Saturn's Clarke orbit lies right within the rings, within Ring B, near the inner edge of the Cassini division.

This means that Ring B, the brightest portion of the ring system, lies almost entirely within the Clarke orbit, and therefore overtakes Saturn's surface as Saturn turns. If, from Saturn, the individual particles of Ring B (and of the rings lying still closer) could be made out, they would be seen to rise in the west and set in the east. Those particles lying beyond the Cassini division, however, would rise in the east and set in the west.

It might seem that we could pick some particle near the inner edge of the Cassini division and set up our instruments on it. We could choose one that was in a Clarke orbit. But then, the myriad of particles that would be closer still to Saturn would block the visibility of that portion of Saturn's surface directly beneath.

There is a Clarke orbit about the Sun, too. It would be at a distance of

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about 26,200,000 kilometres from the Sun's center. This is less than half the distance of Mercury from the Sun.

Back in the late 19th Century, there was considerable speculation that a small planet, called Vulcan, existed inside Mercury's orbit (see THE PLANET THAT WASN'T, May 1975).

Unfortunately, Vulcan does not exist. What a pity! Its orbit would have been bound to be close to the Sun's Clarke orbit. Suppose it were exactly in the Clarke orbit; and that we could reach it and place our instruments upon it, and that those instruments could withstand the fiery furnace of the near-by Sun.

Imagine the view of Sunspots beneath. They could be followed at close range for much of their lifetime. (There would be a complication in that the Sun's surface, at different latitudes, rotates at different speeds, so that the Sunspots would gradually seem to drift away.)

Venus has a very slow period of rotation (243.09 days) and the intensity of its gravitational field is only 0.815 times that of the Earth. You would expect a distant Clarke orbit in that case, and you would get it. Venus's Clarke orbit lies at a distance of 1,537,500 kilometres from the planet's center, just 4 times as far from Venus as the Moon is from Earth. It would be a pretty useless Clarke orbit at that distance.

Mercury's Clarke orbit would be 320,000 kilometres from Mercury, or just a bit short of the distance of the Moon from the Earth.

We might even think of the Clarke orbit of a satellite. The Moon's sidereal period is 27.3 days and its gravitational field has an intensity 0.0123 times that of the Earth. Taking these two factors into account, the Moon's Clarke orbit would lie at a distance of 88,530 kilometres from the Moon's center.

The Moon's Clarke orbit would be just about twice as far from the Moon, as Earth's Clarke orbit would be from Earth. Taking into account Earth's greater mass, and the fact that tidal influence varies inversely as the cube of the distance, we see that Earth's tidal effect on a satellite in the Lunar Clarke orbit would be roughly 745 times as great as the Moon's tidal effect on a satellite in the Terrestrial Clarke orbit.

I suspect that a satellite in the Lunar Clarke orbit would be too perturbed by Earth to remain useful for long. This is likely to be true, I'm sure, for the Clarke orbits of most or all of the satellites. The primary would be almost sure to spoil things.

And that's about all the publicity I'm going to give old whatzisname.

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In addition to being a novelist, critic and editor, Richard Lupoff has written some of the more notable parodies and pastiches in the sf field. There is a small nod to a past master in the story below, but it is primarily a gripping contemporary story about the strange connection between a UFO sighting in Vermont and a young woman in California who receives a message from Beyond....

Documents in the Case of Elizabeth Akeley

BY
RICHARD A. LUPOFF

Surveillance of the Spiritual Light Brotherhood Church of San Diego was initiated as a result of certain events of the mid and late 1970s. Great controversy had arisen over the conduct of the followers of the Guru Maharaj-ji, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (the "Hare Krishna's"), the Church of Scientology, and the Unification Church headed by the Reverend Sun Myung Moon.

These activities were cloaked in the Constitutional shield of "freedom of religion," and the cults for the most part resisted suggestions of investigation by grand juries or other official bodies.

Even so, the tragic events concerning the People's Temple of San Francisco aroused government concern which could not be stymied. While debate raged publicly over the question of opening cult records, federal and local law enforcement agencies covertly entered the field.

It was within this context that interest was aroused concerning the operation of the Spiritual Light Brotherhood, and concerning its leader, the Radiant Mother Elizabeth Akeley.

Outwardly there was nothing secret in the operation of Mother Akeley's church. The group operated from a building located at the corner of Second Street and Ash in a neighborhood described as "genteel shabby," midway between the commercial center of San Diego and the city's tourist-oriented waterfront area.

The building occupied by the church had been erected originally by a more conventional denomination, but the vicissitudes of shifting population caused the building to be deconsecrated and sold to the Spiritual Light Brotherhood. The new owners, led by

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their order's founder and then-leader, the Radiant Father George Goodenough Akeley, clearly marked the building with its new identity.

The headline was changed on the church's bulletin board, and the symbol of the Spiritual Light Brotherhood, a shining tetrahedron of neon tubing, was erected atop the steeple. A worship service was held each Sunday morning, and a spiritual message service was conducted each Wednesday evening.

In later years, following the death of the Radiant Father in 1971 and the accession to leadership of the church by Elizabeth Akeley, church archives were maintained in the form of tape recordings. The Sunday services were apparently a bland amalgam of nondenominational Judeo-Christian teachings, half-baked and quarter-understood Oriental mysticism, and citations from the works of Einstein, Heisenberg, Shklovskii, and Fermi.

Surviving cassettes of the Wednesday message service are similarly innocuous. Congregants were invited to submit questions or requests for messages from deceased relatives. The Radiant Mother accepted a limited number of such requests at each service. The congregants would arrange themselves in a circle and link their fingers in the classic manner of participants in seances. Mother Akeley would enter a trance and proceed to answer the questions or deliver messages from the deceased, "as the spirits moved her."

Audioanalysis of the tapes of these seances indicates that, while the intonation and accent of the voices varied greatly, from the whines and lisps of small children to the quaverings of the superannuated, and from the softened and westernized pronunciations of native San Diegans to the harsh and barbaric tones of their New Yorker parents, the vocal apparatus was at all times that of Elizabeth Akeley. The variations were no greater than those attainable by an actress of professional training or natural brilliance.

Such, however, was not the case with a startling portion of the cassette for the session of Wednesday, June 13th, 1979. The Radiant Mother asked her congregants if anyone had a question for the spirits or if any person present wished to attempt contact with some deceased individual.

A number of questions were answered, dealing with the usual matters of marriage and divorce, reassurances of improved health, and counseling as to investments and careers.

An elderly congregant who was present stated that her husband had died the previous week, and she sought affirmation of his happiness "on the other side."

The Radiant Mother moaned. Then she muttered incoherently. All of this was as usual at the beginning of her trances. Shortly the medium's vocal quality altered. Her normally soft, rather pleasant and distinctly feminine voice dropped in register until it suggested

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that of a man. Simultaneously, her contemporary Californian diction turned to the twang of a rural New Englander.

While the sound quality of this tape is excellent, the medium's diction was unfortunately not so. The resulting record is necessarily fragmentary. As nearly as it has been transcribed, this is it:

"Wilmarth ... Wilmarth ... back. Have come ... Antares ... Neptune, Pluto, Yuggoth. Yes, Wilmarth. Yug —

"Are you.... If I cannot receive.... Windham County ... yes, Townshend ... round hill. Wilmarth still alive? Then who ... son, son....

"... ever receives ... communicate enough Akeley, 176 Pleasant ... go, California. Son, see if you can find my old friend Albert Wilmarth ... chusetts ....

"With wings. Twisted ropes for heads and blood like plant sap.... Flying, flying, and all the while a gramophone recordi ... use apologize to Wilmarth if he's still alive, but I also have the most wonderful news, the most wonderful tales to tell him....

"... and its smaller satellites, well, I don't suppose anyone will believe me, of course, but not only is Yuggoth there, revolving regularly except in an orbit at right angles to the plane of the ecliptic, no wonder no one believed in it, but what I must describe to you, Albert, the planet glows with a heat and a demoniacal ruby glare that illuminates its own ... thon and Zaman, Thog and Thok, I could hardly believe my own....

"... goid beings who cannot ... corporeally ... Neptune ... central caverns of a dark star beyond the rim of the galaxy its....

"... wouldn't call her beautiful, of course ... dinary terms ... than an arachnid and a cetacean, and yet, could a spider and dolphin by some miracle establish mental communion, who knows what ... not really a name as you normally think of names, but ... Sh'ch'rr-rua'a ... of Aldebaran, the eleventh, has a constellation of inhabited moons, which ... independently, or perhaps at some earlier time, traveling by means simi....

"... ummate in metal canisters, will be necessary to ... aid in obtaining ... fair exchange, for the donors will receive a far greater boon in the form...."

At this point the vocal coherence, such as it is, breaks down. The male voice with its New England twang cracks and rises in tone even as the words are replaced by undecipherable mumbles. Mother Akeley recovers from her trance state, and the seance draws quickly to a close. From the internal evidence of the contents of the tape, the Radiant Mother had no awareness of the message, or narration, delivered by the male voice speaking through her. This also is regarded, among psychic and spiritualistic circles, as quite the usual state of affairs with trance mediums.

Authorities next became aware of unusual activities through a copy of the

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Vermont Unidentified Flying Object Intelligencer, or *Vufoi*. Using a variety of the customary cover means and addresses for the purpose, such federal agencies as the FBI, NSA, Department of Defense, NASA, and National Atmospheric and Oceanographic Agency subscribe regularly to publications of organizations like the Vermont UFO Intelligence Bureau and other self-appointed investigatory bodies.

The President of the Vermont UFO Intelligence Bureau and editor of its *Intelligencer* was identified as one Ezra Noyes. Noyes was known to reside with his parents (Ezra was nineteen years of age at the time) in the community of Dark Mountain, Windham County. Noyes customarily prepared *Vufoi* issues himself, assembling material both from outside sources and from members of the Vermont UFO Intelligence Bureau, most of whom were former high school friends now employed by local merchants or farmers, or attending Windham County Community College in Townshend.

Noyes would assemble his copy, type it onto mimeograph stencils using a portable machine set up on the kitchen table, and run off copies on a superannuated mimeograph kept beside the washer and dryer in the basement. The last two items prepared for each issue were "Vufoi Voice" and "From the Editor's Observatory," commenting in one case flippantly and in the other seriously, on the contents of the issue. "Vufoi Voice" was customarily illustrated with a crude cartoon of a man wearing an astronaut's headgear, and was signed "Cap'n Oof-oh." "From the Editor's Observatory" was illustrated with a drawing of an astronomical telescope with a tiny figure seated at the eyepiece, and was signed "Intelligencer."

It is believed that both "Cap'n Oof-oh" and "Intelligencer" were Ezra Noyes.

The issue of the *Vermont Unidentified Flying Object Intelligencer* for June, 1979, actually appeared early in August of that year. Excerpts from the two noted columns follow:

From the Editor's Observatory

Of greatest interest since our last issue — and we apologize for missing the March, April and May editions due to unavoidable circumstances — has been the large number of organic sightings here in the southern Vermont region. We cannot help draw similes to the infamous Colorado cattle mutilizations of the past year or few years, and the ill-conceived Air Farce coverup efforts *which only draw extra attention to the facts that they can't hide from us who know the Truth!*

Local historians like Mr. Littleton at the High School remember other incidents and the Brattleboro *Reformer* and Arkham *Advertiser* and other Newspapers whose back files constitute an Official Public Record could tell the story of other incidents like this one! It is hard to reconciliate the Windham County sightings and the Colorado Cattle Mutiliza-

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tion Case with others such as the well-known Moth Man sightings in the Southland and especially the batwing creature sightings of as long as a half of a century ago but with a sufficient ingeniusity it is definitely not a task beyond undertaking and the U.S. Air Farce and other cover-up agencies are hear-bye placed on Official notice that such is our intention and we will not give up until success is ours and the Cover-up is blown as Sky-High as the UFO sightings themselves!

Yours until our July issue,

Intelligencer.

Vufoi Voice

Bat-wing and Moth Man indeed! Didn't I read something like that in *Detective Comics* back when Steve Englehart was writing for DC? Or was it in *Mad?* Come to think of it, when it's hard to tell the parody from the original, things are gettin' *mighty* strange.

And there gettin' mighty strange around here!

We wonder what the ole Intelligencer's been smoking in that smelly meerschaum he affects around Intelligence Bureau meetings. Could it be something illegal that he grows for himself up on the mountainside? Or is he just playing Sherlock Holmes?

We ain't impressed.

Impressionable, yep! My mom always said I was impressionable as a boy, back on the old asteroid farm in Beta Reticuli, but this is too silly for words.

Besides, she tuck me to the eye dock and he fitted us out with a pair of gen-yew-ine X-ray specs, and that not only cured us of Reticule-eye but now we can see right through such silliness as bat-winged moth men carrying silvery canisters around the skies and the hillsides with 'em.

Shades of a Japanese Sci-Fi Flick! This musta been the stuntman out for lunch!

And that's where we think the old Intelligencer is this month: *Out 2 Lunch!*

Speaking of which, I haven't had mine yet this afternoon, and if I don't hurry up and have it pretty soon it'll be time for dinner and then I'll have to eat my lunch for a bedtime snack and that'll confuse the dickens out of my poor stomach! So I'm off to hit the old fridgidaire (not too hard, I don't want to spoil the shiny finish on my new spaceman's gloves!), and I'll see you-all nextish!

Whoops, here's our saucer now! Bye-bye,

Cap'n Oof-oh.

Following the extraordinary spiritual message service of June 13, Mother Akeley was driven to her home at 176 Pleasant Street in National City, a residential suburb of San Diego, by her boy friend, Marc Feinman. Investigation revealed that she had met Feinman casually while sunning herself and watching the surfers ride the waves in at

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Black's Beach, San Diego.

Shortly thereafter, Elizabeth had been invited by a friend of approximately her own age to attend a concert given by a musical group, a member of which was a friend of Akeley's friend. Outside of her official duties as Radiant Mother of the Spiritual Light Brotherhood, Elizabeth Akeley was known to live quite a normal life for a young woman of her social and economic class.

She accompanied her friend to the concert, visited the backstage area with her, and was introduced to the musician. He in turn introduced Elizabeth to other members of the musical group, one of whom Elizabeth recognized as her casual acquaintance of Black's Beach. A further relationship developed, in which it was known that Akeley and Feinman frequently exchanged overnight visits. Elizabeth had retained the house on Pleasant Street originally constructed by her grandfather, George Goodenough Akeley, when he had emigrated to San Diego from Vermont in the early 1920s. Marc had been born and raised in the Bronx, New York, had emigrated to the West Coast following his college years and presently resided in a pleasant apartment on Upas Street near Balboa Park. From here he commuted daily to his job as a computer systems programmer in downtown San Diego, his work as a musician being more of an avocation than a profession.

On Sunday, June 17, for the morning worship service of the Spiritual Light Brotherhood, Radiant Mother Akeley devoted her sermon to the previous Wednesday's seance, an unusual practice for her. The sexton of the church, a nondescript looking Negro named Vernon Whiteside, attended the service. Noting the Radiant Mother's departure from her usual bland themes, Whiteside communicated with the federal agency which had infiltrated him into the Church for precisely this purpose. An investigation of Mother Akeley's background was then initiated.

Within a short time, agent Whiteside was in possession of a preliminary report on Elizabeth Akeley and her forebears, excerpts from which follow:

AKELEY, ELIZABETH —
HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Akeley family is traceable to one *Beelzebub Akeley* who traveled from Portsmouth, England, to Kingsport, Massachusetts aboard the sailing caravel *Worthy* in 1637. Beelzebub Akeley married an indentured servant girl, bought out her indenture papers and moved with her to establish the Akeley dynasty in Townshend, Windham County, Vermont in 1681. The Akeleys persisted in Windham County for more than two centuries, producing numerous clergy, academics, and other genteel professionals in this period.

Abednego Mesach Akeley, subject's great-great grandfather, was the last of the Vermont Akeleys to pursue a life of the cloth. Born in 1832, Abednego was raised in the strictly puritanical tradi-

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tions of the Akeleys and ordained by his father, the Reverend *Samuel Shadrach Solomon Akeley* upon attaining his maturity. Abednego served as assistant pastor to his father until Samuel's death in 1868, at which time he succeeded to the pulpit.

Directly following the funeral of Samuel Akeley, Abednego is known to have traveled to more southerly regions of New England including Massachusetts and possibly Rhode Island. Upon his return to Townshend he led his flock into realms of highly questionable doctrine and actually transferred the affiliation of his church from its traditional Protestant parent-body to that of the new and suspect Starry Wisdom sect.

Controversy and scandal followed at once, and upon the death of Abednego early in 1871 at the age of 39, the remnants of his congregation moved as a body to Providence, Rhode Island. One female congregant, however, was excommunicated by unanimous vote of the other members of the congregation, and forced to remain behind in Townshend. This female was *Sarah Elizabeth Phillips*, a servant girl in the now defunct Akeley household.

Shortly following the departure of the remnants of Abednego Akeley's flock from Vermont, Sarah Phillips gave birth to a son. She claimed that the child had been fathered by Abednego mere hours before his death. She named the child *Henry Wentworth Akeley*. As the Akeley clan was extinct at this point, no one challenged Sarah's right to identify her son as an Akeley, and in fact in later years she sometimes used the name Akeley herself.

Henry Akeley overcame his somewhat shadowed origins and built for himself a successful academic career, returning to Windham County in his retirement, and remaining there until the time of his mysterious disappearance and presumed demise in the year 1928.

Henry had married some years earlier, and his wife had given birth to a single child, *George Goodenough Akeley*, in the year 1901, succumbing two days later to childbed fever. Henry Akeley raised his son with the assistance of a series of nursemaids and housekeepers. At the time of Henry Akeley's retirement and his return to Townshend, George Akeley emigrated to San Diego, California, building there a modest but comfortable house at 176 Pleasant Street.

George Akeley married a local woman suspected of harboring a strain of Indian blood; the George Akeleys were the parents of a set of quadruplets born in 1930. These were the first quadruplets on record in San Diego County. There were three boys and a girl. The boys seemed, at birth, to be of relatively robust constitution, although naturally small. The girl was still smaller, and seemed extremely feeble at birth so that her survival appeared unlikely.

However, with each passing hour the boys seemed to fade while the tiny girl grew stronger. All four infants clung tenaciously to life, the boys more and

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more weakly and the girl more strongly, until finally the three male infants — apparently at the same hour — succumbed. The girl took nourishment with enthusiasm, grew pink and active. Her spindly limbs rounded into healthy baby arms and legs, and in due course she was carried from the hospital by her father.

In honor of a leading evangelist of the era, and of a crusader for spiritualistic causes, the girl was named *Aimee Doyle Akeley*.

Aimee traveled between San Diego and the spiritualist center of Noblesville, Indiana, with her parents. The George Akeleys spent their winters in San Diego, where George Goodenough Akeley served as Radiant Father of the Spiritual Light Brotherhood, which he had founded in a burst of religious fervor after meeting Aimee Semple McPherson, the evangelist whose name his daughter bore; each summer they would make a spiritualistic pilgrimage to Noblesville, where George Akeley became fast friends with the spiritualist leader and sometime American fascist, *William Dudley Pelley*.

Aimee Doyle Akeley married William Pelley's nephew *Hiram Wesley Pelley* in 1959. In that same year Aimee's mother died and was buried in Noblesville. Her father continued his ministry in San Diego.

In 1961, two years after her marriage to young Pelley, Aimee Doyle Akeley Pelley gave birth to a daughter who was named *Elizabeth Maude Pelley*, after two right-wing political leaders, Elizabeth Dilling of Illinois and Maude Howe of England. Elizabeth Maude Pelley was raised alternately by her parents in Indiana and her grandfather in San Diego.

In San Diego her life was relatively normal, centering on her schooling, her home, and to a lesser extent on her grandfather's church, the Spiritual Light Brotherhood. In Indiana she was exposed to a good deal of political activity of a right-wing extremist nature. Hiram Wesley Pelley had followed in his uncle's footsteps in this regard, and Aimee Doyle Akeley Pelley took her lead from her husband and his family. A number of violent scenes are reported to have transpired between young Elizabeth Pelley and the elder Pelleys.

Elizabeth Pelley returned permanently to San Diego where she took up residence with her grandfather. At this time she abandoned her mother's married name and took the family name as her own, henceforth being known as *Elizabeth Akeley*. Upon the death of George Goodenough Akeley, Elizabeth succeeded to the title of Radiant Mother of the Spiritual Light Brotherhood and the pastorhood of the church, as well as the property on Pleasant Street and a small income from inherited securities.

Vernon Whiteside read the report carefully. Through his position as sex-

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ton of the Spiritual Light Brotherhood Church he had access, as well, to most church records, including the taped archives of the Sunday worship services and Wednesday message services. He followed the Radiant Mother's report to the congregation, in which she referred heavily to the seance of June 13, by borrowing and listening carefully to the tape of the seance itself.

He also obtained a photocopy from agency headquarters of the latest issues of the *Vermont UFO Intelligencer.* These he read carefully, seeking to correlate any references in the newsletter with the Akeley family, or with any other name connected with the Akeleys or the content of the seance tape. He mulled over the Akeleys, Phillipses, Wilmarths, Noyes, and all other references. He attempted also to connect the defunct or at least seemingly defunct Starry Wisdom sect of the New England region, with the San Diego-based Spiritual Light Brotherhood.

At this time it appears also that Elizabeth Akeley began to receive additional messages outside of the Spiritual Light message services. During quiet moments she would lapse involuntarily into her trance or trancelike state. Because she was unable to recall the messages received during these episodes, she prevailed upon Marc Feinman to spend increasing amounts of time with her. During the last week of June and July of 1979 the two were nearly inseparable. They spent every night together, sometimes at Elizabeth's house in National City, sometimes at Marc's apartment on Upas Street.

It was at this time that Vernon Whiteside recommended that agency surveillance of the San Diego cult be increased by the installation of wiretaps on the church and the Pleasant Street and Upas Street residences. This recommendation was approved and recordings were obtained at all three locations. Transcripts are available in agency files. Excerpts follow:

July 25, 1979 (Incoming)

Voice #1 (Definitely identified as Marc Feinman): Hello.

Voice #2 (Tentatively identified as Mrs. Sara Feinman, Marc's mother, Bronx, New York): Marc.

Voice #1: (Pauses.) Yes, Ma.

Voice #2: Markie, are you all right?

Voice #1: Yeah, Ma.

Voice #2: Are you sure? Are you really all right?

Voice #1:Ma, I'm all right.

Voice #2: Okay, just so you're all right, Markie. And work, Markie? How's your work? Is your work all right?

Voice #1: It's all right, Ma.

Voice #2: No problems?

Voice #1: Of course problems, Ma. That's what they pay me to take care of.

Voice #2: Oh my God, Markie! What kind of problems, Markie?

Voice #1: (Pauses, sighs or inhales deeply) We're trying to integrate the 2390 remote console control routines with the sysgen status word register and

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every time we run it against —

Voice #2: (Interrupting) Markie, you know I don't understand that kind of —

Voice #1: (Interrupting) But you asked me —

Voice #2: (Interrupting) Marc, don't contradict your mother. Are you still with that *shicksa?* She's the one who's poisoning your mind against your poor mother. I'll bet she's with you now, isn't she, Marc?

Voice #1: (Sighs or inhales deeply) No, Ma, it's Wednesday. She's never here Wednesdays. She's at church every Wednesday. They have these services every Wedn —

Voice #2: (Interrupting) I'm sure she's a lovely girl, my Markie would never pick a girl who wasn't a lovely girl. I wish you'd kept up your music, Markie. You could have been a great pianist, like Rubenstein or even Lazar Berman that red. You still have that crazy Boxer car, Markie?

Voice #1: Yes, Ma.

Voice #2: That isn't what I called about. I don't understand, Markie, for the money that car must have cost you could have had an Oldsmobile at least, even a Buick like your father. Markie, it's your father I phoned about. Markie, you have to come home. Your father isn't well, Markie. I phoned because he isn't home now but the doctor said he's not a well man. Markie, you have to come home and talk to your father. He respects you, he listens to you, God knows why. Please, Markie.

(Sound of soft crying.)

Voice #1: What's wrong with him, Ma?

Voice #2: I don't want to say it on the telephone.

July 25, 1979 (Outgoing)

Voice #3: (Definitely identified as Vernon Whiteside): Spiritual Light Brotherhood. May the divine light shine upon your path.

Voice #1: Vern, this is Marc. Is Liz still at the church? Is the service over?

Voice #3: The service ended a few minutes ago, Mr. Feinman. The Radiant Mother is resting in the sacristy.

Voice #1: That's what I wanted to know. Listen, Vern, tell Lizzy that I'm on my way, will you? I had a long phone call from my mother and I don't want Liz to worry. Tell her I'll give her a ride home from the church.

Feinman left San Diego by automobile, driving his Ferrari Boxer eastward at a top speed in the 140 MPH range, and arrived at the home of his parents in the Bronx, New York, some time during the night of July 27-28.

In the absence of Marc Feinman, Akeley took agent Whiteside increasingly into her confidence, asking him to remain in her presence day and night. He set up a temporary cot in the living room of the Pleasant Street house during this period. His instructions were to keep a portable cassette recorder handy at all times and to record anything said by Mother Akeley

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during spontaneous trances.

On the first Saturday of August, following a lengthy speech in the now-familiar male New England twang, Akeley asked agent Whiteside for the tape. She played it back, then made the following long-distance telephone call.

August 4, 1979 (Outgoing)

Voice #4 (Tentatively identified as Ezra Noyes): Vermont Bureau. May we help you?

Voice #5 (Definitely identified as Elizabeth Akeley): Is this Mr. Noyes?

Voice #4: Oh, I'm sorry, Dad isn't home. This is Ezra. Can I give him a —

Voice #5 (Interrupting): Oh, I wanted to speak with Ezra Noyes. The editor of the *UFO Intelligencer.*

Voice #4: Oh, yes, right. Yes, that's me. Ezra Noyes.

Voice #5: Mr. Noyes, I wonder if you could help me. I need some information about, ah, recent occurrences in or around Townshend.

Voice #4: That's funny, what did you say your name was?

Voice #5: Elizabeth Akeley.

Voice #4: I thought I knew all my subbers.

Voice #5: Oh, I'm not a subscriber, I got your name from — well, that doesn't matter. Mr. Noyes, I wonder if you could tell me if there have been any unusual UFO sightings in your region lately.

Voice #4 (Suspiciously): Unusual?

Voice #5: Well, these wouldn't be your usual run-of-the-mill flying objects. Flying saucers. I hope that phrase doesn't offend you. These would be more like flying creatures.

Voice #4: Creatures? You mean birds?

Voice #5: No. No. Intelligent creatures.

Voice #4: People, then. You mean Buck Rogers and Wilma Deering with their rocket flying belts.

Voice #5: Please don't be sarcastic, Mr. Noyes. (Pauses.) I mean intelligent, possibly huminoid but nonhuman creatures. Their configuration may vary, but some of them, at least, I believe would have large, membranous wings, probably stretched over a bony or veinous framework in the fashion of bats' or insects' wings. Also, some of them may be carrying artifacts such as polished metallic cylinders of a size capable of containing a — of containing, uh, a human — a human — brain. (Sounds of distress, possible sobbing.)

Voice #4: Miss Akeley? Are you all right, Miss Akeley?

Voice #5: I'm sorry. Yes, I'm all right.

Voice #4: I didn't mean to be so hard on you, Miss Akeley. It's just that we get a lot of crank calls. People wanting to talk to the little green men and that kind of thing. I had to make sure that you weren't —

Voice #5: I understand. And you *have* had —

Voice #4: I'm reluctant to say too much on the phone. Miss Akeley, do

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you think you could get here? There *have* been sightings. And there are older ones. Records in the local papers. A rash of incidents about fifty years ago. And others farther back. There was a monograph by an Eli Davenport over in New Hampshire back in the 1830s. I've got a xerox of it....

Shortly after her telephone conversation with Ezra Noyes, Elizabeth Akeley appealed to Vernon Whiteside for assistance. "I don't want to go alone," she is reported as saying to Whiteside. "Will you help me, Vernon?"

Whiteside, maintaining his cover as the sexton of the Brotherhood, assured Akeley. "Anything the Radiant Mother wishes, ma'am. What would you like me to do?"

"Can you get away for a few days? I have to go to Vermont. Would you book two tickets for us? There are church funds to cover the cost."

"Yes, ma'am." Whiteside lowered his head. "Best way would be via Logan International in Boston, then a Vermont Lines bus to Brattleboro and Newfane."

Akeley made no comment on the sexton's surprising familiarity with transcontinental air routes or with the bus service between Boston and upper New England. She was obviously in an agitated state, Whiteside reported when he checked in with his superiors prior to their departure from San Diego.

Two days later the Negro sexton and the Radiant Mother climbed down from the bus at Newfane, Vermont. They were met at the town's run-down and musty-smelling station by Ezra Noyes. Noyes was driving his parents' 1969 Nash Ambassador station wagon and willingly loaded Akeley's and Whiteside's meager baggage into the rear cargo deck of the vehicle.

Ezra chauffeured the visitors to his parents' home. The house, a gambrel-roofed structure of older design, was fitted for a larger family than the two elder Noyes and their son Ezra; in fact, an elder son and daughter had both married and departed Windham County for locales of greater stimulation and professional opportunity, leaving two surplus bedrooms in the Noyes home.

Noyes was eager to offer his own services and assistance to Akeley and Whiteside. Elizabeth informed Ezra Noyes that she had received instructions to meet a visitor at a specific location near the town of Passumpsic in neighboring Windsor County. She did not explain to Noyes the method of her receiving these instructions, but Vernon Whiteside's later report indicated that he was aware of them, the instructions having been delivered to Miss Akeley in spontaneous trance sessions, the tapes of which he had also heard.

It must be again emphasized at this point that the voice heard on the spon-

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taneous trance tapes was, in different senses, both that of Miss Akeley and of another personage. The pitch and accent, as has been stated, were those of an elderly male speaking in a semi-archaic New England twang while the vocal apparatus itself was unquestionably that of Elizabeth Akeley, *née* Elizabeth Maude Pelley.

Miss Akeley's instructions were quite specific in terms of geography, although it was found odd that they referred only to landmarks and highway or road facilities known to exist in the late 1920s. Young Noyes was able to provide alternate routes for such former roadways as had been closed when superseded by more modern construction.

Before retiring, Elizabeth Akeley placed a telephone call to the home of Marc Feinman's parents in the Bronx. In this call she urged Feinman to join her in Vermont. Feinman responded that his father, at the urging of himself and his mother, had consented to undergo major surgery. Marc promised to travel to Vermont and rendezvous with Akeley at the earliest feasible time, but indicated that he felt obliged to remain with his parents until the surgery was completed and his father's recovery assured.

The following morning Elizabeth Akeley set out for Passumpsic. She was accompanied by Vernon Whiteside and traveled in the Nash Ambassador station wagon driven by Ezra Noyes.

Her instructions had contained very specific and very emphatic requirements that she keep the rendezvous alone, although others might provide transportation and wait while the meeting took place. The party who had summoned Elizabeth Akeley to the rendezvous had not, to this time, been identified, although it was believed to be the owner of the male voice and New England twang who had spoken through Elizabeth herself in her trances.

Prior to departing Windham County for Windsor County, a discussion took place between Akeley and Whiteside. Whiteside appealed to Elizabeth Akeley to permit him to accompany her to the rendezvous.

That would be impossible, Akeley stated.

Whiteside pointed out Elizabeth's danger, in view of the unknown identity of the other party. When Akeley remained adamant, Whiteside gave in and agreed to remain with Ezra Noyes during the meeting. It must be pointed out that at this time the dialogue was not cast in the format of a highly trained and responsible agent of the federal establishment, and an ordinary citizen; rather, the facade which Whiteside rightly although with difficulty maintained was that of a sexton of the Spiritual Light Brotherhood acting under the authority of and in the service of the Radiant Mother of that Church.

Whiteside did, however, succeed in convincing Akeley to wear a wireless

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microphone disguised as an enamel ladybug ornament on the lapel of her jacket. Akeley, of course, was garbed in ordinary street clothing at the time, reserving her ecclesiastical vestments for use during official functions of the Church.

The microphone transmitted on a frequency which was picked up by a small microcassette recorder which Whiteside was to keep with him in or near the Nash station wagon; additionally, an earphone ran from the recorder so that Whiteside was enabled to monitor the taped information in real time.

The Nash Ambassador crossed the county line from Windham into Windsor on a two-lane county highway. This had been a dirt road in the 1920s, blacktopped with federal funds administered by the Works Progress Administration under Franklin Roosevelt, and superseded by a nearby four-lane asphalt highway built during the Eisenhower presidency. The blacktop received minimal maintenance; and only pressure from local members of the Vermont legislature, this brought in turn at the insistence of local residents who used the highway for access to Passumpsic, South Londonderry, and Bellows Falls, prevented the state from declaring the highway closed and striking it from official roadmaps.

Reaching the town of Passumpsic, Akeley, who had never previously traveled farther east than Indianapolis, Indiana, told Ezra to proceed 800 yards, at which point the car was to be halted. Ezra complied. At the appointed spot, Akeley left the car and opened a gate in the wooden fence fronting the highway.

Noyes pulled the wagon from the highway through the gate and found himself on a narrow track that had once been a small dirt road, long since abandoned and overgrown.

This dirt road led away from the highway and into hilly farm country, years before abandoned by the poor farmers of the region, that lay between Passumpsic and Ludlow.

Finally, having rounded an ancient dome-topped protuberance that stood between the station wagon and any possible visual surveillance from the blacktop highway or even the overgrown dirt road, the Nash halted, unable to continue. The vegetation hereabouts was of a peculiar nature. While most of the region consisted of thin, played-out soil whose poor fertility was barely adequate to sustain a covering of tall grasses and undersized, gnarly-trunked trees, in the small area set off by the dome-topped hill the growth was thick, lush and luxuriant.

However, there was a peculiar quality to the vegetation, a characteristic which even the most learned botanist would have been hard pressed to identify, and yet which was undeniably present. It was as if the vegetation were *too* vibrantly alive, as if it sucked greedily at the earth for nourishment and by so doing robbed the country-

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side for a mile or more in every direction of sustenance.

Through an incongruously luxuriant copse of leafy trees a small building could be seen, clearly a shack of many years' age and equally clearly of long abandonment. The door hung angularly from a single rusted hinge, the windows were cracked or missing altogether, and spiders had filled the empty frames with their own geometric handiwork. The paint, if ever the building had known the touch of a painter's brush, had long since flaked away and been blown to oblivion by vagrant tempests, and the bare wood beneath had been cracked by scores of winters and bleached by as many summers' suns.

Elizabeth Akeley looked once at the ramshackle structure, nodded to herself and set out slowly to walk to it. Vernon Whiteside set himself at her elbow, and Ezra Noyes set a pace just a stride behind the others, but Akeley halted at once, turned and gestured silently but decisively to the others to remain behind. She then resumed her progress through the copse.

Whiteside watched Elizabeth Akeley proceeding slowly but with apparently complete self-possession through the wooded area. She halted just outside the shack, leaned forward and slightly to one side as if peering through a cobwebbed window frame, then proceeded again. She tugged at the door, managed to drag it open with a squeal of rusted metal and protesting wood, and disappeared inside the shack.

"Are you just going to let her go like that?" Ezra Noyes demanded of Whiteside. "How do you know who's in there? What if it's a Beta Reticulan? What if it's a Moth Man? What if there's a whole bunch of aliens in there? They might have a tunnel from the shack to their saucer. The whole thing might be a front. Shouldn't we go after her?"

Whiteside shook his head. "Mother Akeley issued clear instructions, Ezra. We are to wait here." He reached inside his jacket and unobtrusively flicked on the concealed microcassette recorder. When he pulled his hand from his pocket, he brought with it the earphone. He adjusted it carefully in his ear.

"Oh, I didn't know you were deaf," Noyes said.

"Just a little," Whiteside replied.

"Well, what are we going to do?" Ezra asked him.

"I shall wait for the Radiant Mother," Whiteside told him. "There is nothing to fear. Have faith in the Spiritual Light, little brother, and your footsteps will be illuminated."

"Oh." Ezra made a sour face and climbed onto the roof of the Ambassador. He seated himself there cross-legged to watch for any evidence of activity at the shack.

Vernon Whiteside also kept watch on the shack, but chiefly he was listening to the voices transmitted by the

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cordless microphone concealed on Elizabeth Akeley's lapel. Excerpts from the transcript later made of these transmissions follow:

Microcassette, August 8, 1979

Voice #5 (Elizabeth Akeley): Hello? Hello? Is there —

Voice #6 (Unidentified voice; oddly metallic intonation; accent similar to male New England twang present in San Diego trance tapes): Come in, come in, don't be afraid.

Voice #5: It's so dark in here.

Voice #6: I'm sorry. Move carefully. You are perfectly safe but there is some delicate apparatus set up.

(Sounds of movement, feet shuffling, breathing, a certain vague *buzzing* sound. Creak as of a person sitting in an old wooden rocking chair.)

Voice #5: I can hardly see. Where are you?

Voice #6: The cells are very sensitive. My friends are not here. You are not Albert Wilmarth.

Voice #5: No, I don't even —

Voice #6: (Interrupting) Oh, my God! Of course not. It's been so — what year is this?

Voice #5: Nineteen seventy-nine.

Voice #6: Poor Albert. Poor Albert. He could have come along. But of course he — what did you say your name was, young woman?

Voice #5: Akeley. Elizabeth Akeley.

(Silence. Buzzing sound. A certain unsettling sound as of wings rustling, but wings larger than those of any creature known to be native to Vermont.)

Voice #6: Do not taunt me, young woman!

Voice #5: Taunt you? Taunt you?

Voice #6: Do you know who I am? Does the name Henry Wentworth Akeley mean nothing to you?

(Pause ... buzzing ... rustling.)

Voice #5: Yes! Yes! Oh, oh, this is incredible! This is wonderful! It means — Yes, my grandfather spoke of you. If you're really — My grandfather was George Akeley. He — we —

Voice #6: (Interrupting) Then I am your great-grandfather, Miss Akeley. I regret that I cannot offer you my hand. George Akeley was my son. Tell me, is he still alive?

Voice #5: No, he — he died. He died in 1971, eight years ago. I was a little girl, but I remember him speaking of his father in Vermont. He said you disappeared mysteriously. But he always expected to hear from you again. He even founded a church. The Spiritual Light Brotherhood. He never lost faith. I have continued his work. Waiting for word from — beyond. That's why I came when I — when I started receiving messages.

Voice #6: Thank you. Thank you, Elizabeth. Perhaps I should not have stayed away so long, but the vistas, my child, the vistas! How old did you say you were?

Voice #5: Why — why — 18. Almost 19.

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(Buzzing.)

Voice #6: You have followed my directions, Elizabeth? You are alone? Yes? Good. The cells are very sensitive. I can see you, even in this darkness, even if you cannot see me. Elizabeth, I have been gone from earth for half a century, yet I am no older than the day I — departed — in the year 1928. The sights I have seen, the dimensions and the galaxies I have visited! Not alone, my child. Of course not alone. Those ones who took me — ah, child! Human flesh is too weak, too fragile to travel beyond the earth.

Voice #5: But there are spacesuits. Rockets. Capsules. Oh, I suppose that was after your time. But we've visited the moon. We've sent instruments to Venus and Mars and the moons of Jupiter.

Voice #6: And what you know is what Columbus might have learned of the New World, by paddling a rowboat around the port of Cadiz! Those ones who took me, those old ones! They can fly between the worlds on their great ribbed wings! They can span the very ether of space as a dragonfly flits across the surface of a pond! They are the greatest scientists, the greatest naturalists, the greatest anthropologists, the greatest explorers in the universe! Those whom they select to accompany them, if they cannot survive the ultimate vacuum of space, the old ones discard their bodies and seal their brains in metal canisters and carry them from world to world, from star to burning, glittering star!

(Buzzing, loud sound of rustling.)

Voice #5: Then — you have been to other worlds? Other planets, other physical worlds. Not other planes of spiritual existence. Our congregants believe —

Voice #6: (Interrupting) Your congregants doubtlessly believed poppycock. Yes, I have been to other worlds. I have seen all the planets of the solar system, from little, sterile Mercury to giant, distant Yuggoth.

Voice #5: Distant Yu — Yuggoth?

Voice #6: Yes, yes. I suppose those fool astronomers have yet to find it, but it is the gem and the glory of the solar system, glowing with its own ruby-red glare. It revolves in its own orbit, turned ninety degrees from the plane of the ecliptic. No wonder they've never seen it. They don't know where to look. Yet it perturbs the paths of Neptune and Pluto. That ought to be clue enough! Yuggoth is very nearly a sun. It possesses its own corps of worldlets, Nithon, Zaman, the miniature twins Thog and Thok! And there is life there! There is the Ghooric Zone where bloated shoggoths splash and spawn!

Voice #5: I can't — I can't believe all this! My own great-grandpa! Planets and beasts....

Voice #6: Yuggoth was merely the beginning for me. Those ones carried me far away from the sun. I have seen the worlds that circle Arcturus and Centaurus, Wolf and Barnard's Star

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and Beta Reticuli. I have seen creatures whose physical embodiment would send a sane man mad into screaming nightmares of horror that never ends — and whose minds and souls would put to shame the proudest achievements of Einstein and Schopenhauer, Confucius and Plato, the Enlightened One and the Anointed One! And I have known love, child, love such as no earth-bound mortal has ever known.

Voice #5: Lo-love, great-grandfather?

(Sound of buzzing, loud and agitated rustling of wings.)

Voice #6: You know about love, surely, Elizabeth. Doesn't your church preach a gospel of love? In 57 years on this planet I never came across a church that didn't claim that. And have you known love? A girl your age, surely you've known the feeling by now.

Voice #5: Yes, great-grandfather.

Voice #6: Is it merely a physical attraction, Elizabeth? Do you believe that souls can love? Or do you believe in such things as souls? Can *minds* love one another?

Voice #5: All three. All three of those.

Voice #6: Good. Yes, all three. And when two beings love with their minds and their souls, they yearn also for bodies with which to express their love. Hence the physical manifestation of love. (Pause.) Excuse me, child. In a way I suppose I'm nothing but an old man rambling on about abstractions. You have a young man, have you?

Voice #5: Yes.

Voice #6: I would like to meet him. I would like very much to meet him, my child.

Voice #5: Great-grandfather. May I tell the people about you?

Voice #6: No, Elizabeth. The time is not ripe.

Voice #5: But this is the most important event since — since — (Pause.) Contact with other beings, with other races, not of Earth. Proof that there is intelligent life throughout the universe. Proof of visits between the worlds and between the galaxies.

Voice #6: All in time, child. Now I am tired. Please go now. Will you visit me again?

Voice #5: Of course. Of course.

Elizabeth Akeley emerged from the shack, took one step and staggered.

At the far side of the copse of trees, Vernon Whiteside and Ezra Noyes watched. They saw Elizabeth. Ezra scrambled from the roof of the station wagon. Whiteside started forward, prepared to assist Mother Akeley.

But she had merely been blinded, for the moment, by the bright sunlight of a Vermont August. Whiteside and Ezra Noyes saw her returning through the glade. Once or twice she stopped and leaned against a strangely spongy tree. Each time she started again, apparently further debilitated rather than restored.

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She reached the station wagon and leaned against its drab metalwork. Whiteside said, "Are you all right, Radiant Mother?"

She managed a wan smile. "Thank you, Vernon. Yes, I'm all right. Thank you."

Ezra Noyes was beside himself.

"Who was in there? What was going on? Were there really aliens in that shack? Can I go? Oh, darn it, darn it!" He pounded one fist into the palm of his other hand. "I should never have left home without my camera! Kenneth Arnold himself said that back in '47. It's the prime directive of all ufologists, and I went off without one, me of all people."

Vernon Whiteside said, "Radiant Mother, do you wish to leave now? May I visit the shack first?"

"Please, Vernon, don't. I asked him—" She drew Whiteside away from Noyes. "I asked him if I could reveal this to the world and he said, not yet."

"I monitored the tape, Reverend Mother."

"Yes."

"What does it mean, Reverend Mother?"

She passed her hand across her face, tugging soft bangs across her eyes to block out the bright sunlight. "I feel faint. Vernon. Ask Ezra to drive us back to Dark Mountain, would you?"

He helped her climb into the station wagon and signaled to Ezra. "Mother Akeley is fatigued. She must be taken back at once."

Ezra sighed and started the Ambassador's straight-six engine.

Elizabeth Akeley telephoned Marc Feinman from the Noyes house in Dark Mountain. A message had been transmitted surreptitiously by agent Whiteside in time for monitoring arrangements to be made. Neither Akeley nor Feinman was aware of the monitoring system.

Excerpts from the call follow:

August 9, 1979 (outgoing)

Voice #2 (Sara Feinman): Yes.

Voice #5 (Elizabeth Akeley): Mrs. Feinman?

Voice #2: Yes, who is this?

Voice #5: Mrs. Feinman, this is Elizabeth Akeley speaking. I'm a friend of Marc's from San Diego. Is Marc there, please?

Voice #2: I know all about Marc's friend, Elizabeth darling. Don't you know Marc's father is in the hospital? Should you be bothering Marc at such a time?

Voice #5: I'm very sorry about Mr. Feinman, Mrs. Feinman. Marc told me before he left California. Is he all right?

Voice #2: Don't ask.

(Pause.)

Voice #5: Could I speak with Marc? Please?

Voice #2: (Off-line, pickup is very faint) Marc, here, it's your little goyish priestess. Yes. On the telephone. No, she didn't say where. No, she didn't say.

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Voice #1 (Marc Feinman): Lizzy? Lizzy baby, are you okay?

Voice #5: Yes, I'm okay. Is your father —

Voice #1: (Interrupting) They operated this morning. I saw him after. He's very weak, Liz. But I think he's going to make it. Lizzy, where are you? Pleasant Street?

Voice #5: Vermont.

Voice #1: What? *Vermont?*

Voice #5: I couldn't wait, Marc. You were on the road, and there was another trance. I couldn't wait till you arrived in New York. Vernon came with me. We're staying with a family in Dark Mountain. Marc, I met my great-grandfather. Yesterday. I tried to call you last night but —

Voice #1: I was at the hospital with Ma, visiting my father. We couldn't just —

Voice #5: Of course, Marc. You did the right thing. (Pause.) How soon can you get here?

Voice #1: I can't leave now. My father is still — they're not sure. (Lowering voice.) I don't want to talk too loud. The doctor said it's going to be touch and go for at least forty-eight hours. I can't leave Ma.

Voice #5: (Sobs.) I understand, Marc. But — but — my great-grandfather....

Voice #1: How old is the old coot? He must be at least ninety.

Voice #5: He was born in 1871. He's 108.

Voice #1: My God! Talk about tough old Yankee stock!

Voice #5: It isn't that, Marc! It has to do with the trance messages. Don't you understand? All of that strange material about alien beings, and other galaxies? That was no sci-fi trip —

Voice #1: I never said you were making it up, Lizzy! Your subconscious, though, I mean, you see some TV show or a movie and —

Voice #5: But that's just it, Marc! Those are real messages. Not from my subconscious. My great-grandpa was sending, oh, call them spirit messages or telepathic radiations or anything you like. He's here. He's back. Aliens took him away, they took his brain in a metal cylinder, and he's been traveling in outer space for fifty years, and now he's back here in Vermont and —

Voice #1: Okay, Lizzy, enough! Look, I'll drive up there as soon as I can get away. As soon as my father's out of danger. I can't leave my Ma now, but as soon as I can. What's this place....

Late in the afternoon of August 9th Ezra Noyes rapped on the door of Elizabeth Akeley's room. She admitted him and he stood in the center of the room, nervously wondering whether it would be proper to sit in her presence. Akeley urged him to sit. The conversation which ensued was recalled by young Noyes in a deposition taken later at an agency field office. Excerpts from the deposition follow:

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* * *

"Well, you see, I told her that I was really serious about UFO's and all that stuff. She didn't know much about ufology. She'd never heard about the men in black, even. So I told her all about them so she'd be on the lookout. I asked her who this Vernon Whiteside was, and she said he was the sexton of her church and completely reliable and I shouldn't worry about him.

"I showed her some copies of the *Intelligencer*, and she said she liked the mag a lot and asked if she could keep them. I said sure. Anyway, she wanted to know how long the Moth Man sightings had been going on. I told her, only about six months or so over at Townshend and around here. Then she asked me what I knew about a rash of similar sightings about fifty years ago.

"That was right up my alley. You know, I did a lot of research. I went down and read a lot of old newspaper files. They have the old papers on microfilm now; it kills your eyes to crouch over a reader all day looking at the old stuff, but it's really interesting.

"Anyway, there were some odd sightings back in the '20s, and then when they had those floods around here in November '27, there were some really strange things. They found some bodies, parts of bodies that is, carried downstream in the flood. There were some in the Winooski River over near Montpelier, and some right in the streets of Passumpsic. The town was flooded, you know.

"Strange bodies. Things like big wings. Not like moth wings, though. More like bat wings. And there seems to have been some odd goings on with Miss Akeley's great-grandfather, Henry Akeley. He was a retired prof, you know. And something about a friend of his, a guy called Al Wilmarth. But it was all hushed up.

"Well, I told Miss Akeley everything I knew and then I asked her who was in the cabin over at that dirt road near Ludlow. I think she must have got mixed up, because she said it was Henry Akeley. He disappeared in 1927 or '28. Even if he turned up, he couldn't be alive by now. She said he said something to her about love, and about wanting a young man's body and a young woman's body so he could make love with some woman from outer space, he said from Aldebaran. I guess you have to be a sci-fi nut to know about Aldebaran. I'm a sci-fi nut. I don't say too much about it in UFO circles — they don't like sci-fi, they think the sci-fi crowd put down UFO's. They're scared of 'em. They want to keep it all nice and safe and imaginary, you ought to read Sanderson and Early on that some time.

"Well, how could a human and an alien make love? I guess old Akeley must have thought something like mind-transfer, like one partner could take over the body of a member of the other partner's species, you know. Only be careful, don't try it with spiders where the female eats the male after

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they mate. Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha!

"But Miss Akeley kept asking about lovemaking, you know, and I started to wonder if maybe she wasn't hinting at something, you know. I mean, there we were in this room. And it was my own parents' house and all, but it *was* a bedroom, and I didn't want her to think that she could just walk in there and, uh, well, you know.

"So I excused myself then. But she seemed upset. She kept running her hand through her hair. Pulling it down, those strips, what do women call them, bangs, over her forehead. I told her I had to get to work on the next ish of my mag, you know, and she'd have to excuse me but the last ish had been late and I was trying to get the mag back on schedule. But I told her, if she wanted a lift over to Passumpsic again, I'd be glad to give her a ride over there any time, and I'd like to meet her great-grandfather if he was living in that old shack. Then she said he wasn't exactly living in the shack, but he sort of was, sort of was there and sort of was living there. It didn't make any sense to me. So I went and started laying out the next issue of the *Intelligencer* 'cause I wanted to get it out on time for once, and show those guys that I can get a mag out on time when I get a chance.

"Anyway, Miss Akeley said her great-grandfather's girlfriend was named something like Sheera from Aldebaran. I told her that sounded like something out of a bad '50's sci-fi flick on the TV. There's a great channel in Montreal, we get it on the cable, they show sci-fi flicks every week. And that sure sounded like a sci-fi flick to me.

"Sheera from Aldebaran! Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha!"

Marc Feinman wheeled his Ferrari up to the Noyes home. His sporty driving-cap was cocked over one ear. Suede jacket, silk shirt, gucci jeans and frye boots completed his outfit.

The front door swung in as Feinman's boot struck the bottom wooden step. Elizabeth Akeley was across the whitewashed porch and in Feinman's arms before he reached the top of the flight. Without releasing his embrace of Akeley, Feinman extended one hand to grasp that of Vernon Whiteside.

They entered the house. Ezra Noyes greeted them in the front parlor. Elizabeth and Vernon briefed Marc on the events since their arrival in Vermont. When the narrative was brought up to date, Feinman asked simply, "What do you want to do?"

Ezra started to blurt out an ambitious plan for gaining the confidence of the aliens and arranging a ride in their saucer, but Whiteside, still maintaining the role of sexton of the Spiritual Light Church, cut him off. "We will do whatever the Radiant Mother asks us to do."

All eyes turned to Akeley.

After an uncomfortable interval she said, "I was — hoping that Marc could help. It's so strange, Marc. I

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know that I'm the one who always believed in — in the spirit world. The beyond. What you always call the supernormal."

Feinman nodded.

"But somehow," Elizabeth went on, "this seems more like your ideas than mine. It's so — I mean, this is the kind of thing that I've always looked for, believed in. And you haven't. And now that it's true, it doesn't seem to have any spiritual meaning. It's just — something that you could explain with your logic and your computers."

Feinman rubbed his slightly blue chin with his free hand. "This great-grandpa of yours, this Henry Akeley ...."

He looked into her eyes.

"You say, he was talking about some kind of mating ritual?"

Liz nodded.

Feinman said, "What did he look like? Did you ever *see* your great-grandfather before? Even a picture? Maybe one that your grandfather had in San Diego?"

She shook her head. "No. At least, I don't remember ever seeing a photo at home. There might have been one. But I hardly saw anything in the shack, Marc."

Ezra Noyes was jumping up and down in his chair. "Yes, you never told us, Lizzy — Miss Akeley. What did you see? What did he look like?"

"I hardly saw anything!" Liz covered her face with her hands, dropped one to her lap, tugged nervously at her bangs with the other. "It was pitch-dark in there. Just a little faint light seeping between the cracks in the walls, through those broken windows. Those that weren't broken were so filthy, they wouldn't let any light in."

"So you couldn't tell if it was really Henry Akeley."

"It was the same voice," Vernon Whiteside volunteered. "We, ah, we bugged the meeting, Mr. Feinman. The voice was the same as the one on the trance tapes from the church."

Feinman's eyes widened. "The same? But the trance tapes are in Lizzy's voice!"

Whiteside backpedaled. "No, you're right. I don't suppose they were the same vocal chords. But the timbre. And the enunciation. Everything. Same person speaking. I'd stake my reputation on it!"

Feinman stroked his chin again. "All right. Here's what I'd like to do. Lizzy, Henry Akeley said he'd see you again, right? Okay, let's surprise him a little. Suppose Whiteside and I head out there. Can you find the shack again, Vernon? Good! Okay, we'll take the Ferrari out there."

"But it's nearly dark out."

"No difference if it's so damned dark inside the shack! I've got a good five-cell torch in the emergency kit in the Ferrari."

"I ought to come along," Ezra Noyes put in. "I *do* represent the Vermont UFO Intelligence Bureau, you know!"

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"Right," Feinman nodded. "And we'll need your help later. No, we'll need you, Ezra, but not right now. Whiteside and I will visit Henry Akeley — or whoever or whatever is out there claiming to be Henry Akeley. Give us a couple of hours' head start. And then, you come ahead. Lizzy, you and Ezra here."

"Can I get into the shack this time?" Ezra jumped up and paced nervously, almost danced, back and forth. "The other time, I had to wait at the car. If I can get into the shack, I can get some photos. I'll rig up a flash on my Instamatic. I want to get some shots of the inside of that cabin for the Intelligencer."

"Yes, sure." Feinman turned from Ezra Noyes and took Elizabeth Akeley's hand. "You don't mind, do you, Lizzy? I'm worried that your ancestor there — or whoever it is — has some kind of control over you. Those trances — what if he puts you under some kind of hypnotic influence while we're all out there together."

"How do you know he's evil? You seem to — just assume that Henry Akeley wants to harm me."

"I don't know that at all." Feinman frowned. "I just have a nasty feeling about it. I want to get there first. I think Whiteside and I can handle things, and then you can arrive in a while. Please, Lizzy. You did call me to help. You didn't have to, you could have just gone back and never said anything to me until it was over."

Elizabeth looked very worried. "Maybe I should have."

"Well, but you didn't. Now, can we do it this way? Please?"

"All right, Marc."

Feinman turned to Vernon Whiteside. "Let's go. How long a ride is it out there?"

Whiteside paused for a moment. "Little less than an hour."

Feinman grunted. "Okay. Vernon and I will start now. We'll need about an hour, I suppose — call it two to be on the safe side. Lizzy and Ezra, if you'll follow us out to the shack in two hours, just come ahead in, we'll be there."

Ezra departed to check his camera. Vernon accompanied Marc. Shortly the Ferrari Boxer disappeared in a cloud of yellow Vermont dust, headed for Passumpsic.

As soon as they had pulled out of sight of the house, Vernon spoke. "Mr. Feinman, I've been helping Radiant Mother on this trip."

"I know that, Vernon. Lizzy mentioned it several times. I really appreciate it."

"Mr. Feinman, you know how concerned Radiant Mother is about Church archives. The way she records her sermons and the message services. Well, she was worried about her meeting with old Mr. Akeley. So I helped her to rig a wireless mike on her jacket. So we got a microcassette of the meeting."

Feinman said he knew that.

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"Well, if you don't mind, I'd like to do the same again." Whiteside held the tiny microcassette recorder for Feinman to see. The Ferrari's V-12 purred throatily, loafing along the Passumpsic road in third gear.

"Sure. That's a good idea. But you needn't rig me up. I want you along. You can just mike yourself."

Vernon Whiteside considered. "Tell you what...." He reached into his pocket, pulled out a pair of enamel ladybugs. "I'll mike us both. If we happen to pick up the same sounds, there'll be no harm. In fact, it'll give us a redundancy check. If we get separated —"

"I don't see why we should."

"Just in case." He pinned a ladybug to Feinman's suede jacket, attached the second bug to his own. He made a minor adjustment to the recorder.

"There." He slipped the recorder back into his pocket. "I separated the input circuits. Now we'll record on two channels. We can mix the sound if we record the same events or keep it separate if we pick up different events. In fact, just to be on the safe side, suppose I leave the recorder here in the car when you and I go to the shack."

Feinman assented, and Whiteside peeled the sealers from a dime-sized disk of double-adhesive foam. He stuck it to the recorder and stuck the recorder to the bottom of the Ferrari's dashboard.

"You're the sexton of the Spiritual Light Church," Feinman said.

"Yes, sir."

"You know a hell of a lot about electronics."

"My sister's boy, Mr. Feinman. Bright youngster. It's his hobby."

Feinman tooled the Ferrari around the dome-topped hill and pulled to a halt where the Noyes station wagon had parked on the earlier visit. The sun was setting and the somehow too-lush glade was filled with murk.

Vernon Whiteside reached under the dashboard and flicked the microcassette recorder to automatic mode. He climbed from the car.

Feinman went to the rear of the Ferrari and extracted a long-handled electric torch. He pulled his sports cap down over his eyes and touched Whiteside's elbow. The men advanced.

The events that transpired following this entrance to the sycamore copse were captured on the microcassette recorder, and a transcript of these sounds appears later in the report.

In the meanwhile, Elizabeth Akeley and Ezra Noyes waited at the Noyes home in Dark Mountain.

Two hours to the minute, after the departure of Marc Feinman and Vernon Whiteside in Feinman's Ferrari Boxer, the Noyes station wagon, its aged suspension creaking, pulled out of the driveway.

Ezra pushed the Nash to the limit of its tired ability, chattering the while to Elizabeth. Preoccupied, she responded with low monosyllables. At the turning-point from the Passumpsic-Lud-

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low road onto the old farm track, she waited in the station wagon while Ezra climbed down and opened the fence gate.

The Nash's headlights picked a narrow path for the car, circling the dome-topped hill that blocked the copse of lush vegetation from sight of passers-by. The Ferrari Boxer stood silently at the edge of the copse.

Ezra lifted his camera-bag from the floor and slung it over his shoulder. Elizabeth waited in the car until Ezra walked to her side, opened the door and offered his hand.

They started through the copse. Noyes testified later that this was his first experience with the unusual growth of vegetation. He claimed that, even as he set foot beneath the overhanging branches of the first sycamore, a strange sensation passed through him. The day had been hot, and even in the hours of darkness the temperature did not drop drastically. Even so, with his entry into the copse Noyes felt an unnatural and debilitating *heat*, as if the trees were fitted to a different climate than that of northern Vermont and actually were emitting heat of their own.

He began to perspire and wiped his forehead with his hand.

Elizabeth Akeley led the way through the wooded area, retracing the steps of her previous visit to the wooden shack.

Noyes found it more and more difficult to continue. With each pace he felt drained of energy and will. Once he halted and was about to sit down for a rest, but Akeley grasped his hand and pulled him with her.

When they emerged from the copse, the dome-topped hill stood directly behind them, the rundown shack directly ahead.

Ezra and Elizabeth crossed the narrow grassy patch between the sycamore copse and the ramshackle cabin. Ezra found a space where the glass had fallen away and there was a small opening in the omnipresent cobwebs. He peered in, then lifted his camera and poked its lens through the opening. He shot a picture.

"Don't know what I got, but maybe I got something," he said.

Elizabeth Akeley pulled the door open. She stepped inside the cabin, closely followed by young Noyes.

The room, Ezra could see, was far larger than he'd estimated from the outside. Although the shack contained but a single room, that room was astonishingly deep. Its far corners were utterly lost in shadow. Nearer to him were a rocking chair, a battered overstuffed couch and a dust-laden wooden table of the type often found in old New England homes.

Ezra later reported hearing odd sounds during these minutes. There was a strange buzzing sound. He couldn't tell whether it was organic — a sound such as a flight of hornets might have made, or such as might have been made by a single insect mag-

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nified to a shocking gigantism — or whether the sound was artificial, as if an electrical generator were running slightly out of adjustment.

The modulation of the sound was its oddest characteristic. Not only did the volume rise and fall, but the pitch, and in some odd way, the very tonal quality of the buzzing, kept changing. "It was as if something was trying to talk to me. To us. To Miss Akeley and me. I thought I could almost understand it, but not quite."

Noyes stood, all but paralyzed, until he heard Elizabeth Akeley scream. Ezra whirled from the table, whence had emanated the buzzing sounds. He saw Elizabeth standing before the rocking chair, her hands to her face, screaming.

The chair was rocking back and forth, slowly, gently. The cabin was almost pitch-black, its only illumination coming from an array of unfamiliar machinery set up on the long wooden table. Ezra could see now that a figure was seated, apparently unmoving, in the rocker. From it a voice was coming.

"Elizabeth, my darling, you have come," the voice said. "Now we shall be together. We shall know the love of the body as we have known the love of the mind and of the soul."

Strangely, Noyes later stated, although the voice in which the figure spoke was that of Marc Feinman, the accent and intonation were those of New England old-timers. Noyes testified also that his powers of observation played a strange trick on him at this moment. Although the man sitting in the chair was undoubtedly Marc Feinman — the clothing he wore, even to the sporting cap pulled low over his eyes, as if he were driving his Ferrari in a bright sun — what Ezra noticed most particularly was a tiny red-and-black smudge on Feinman's jacket. "It looked like a squashed ladybug," the youth stated later.

From somewhere in the darker corners of the cabin there came a strange rustling sound, like that of great leathery wings opening and folding again.

Noyes shot a quick series of pictures, one of the figure in the rocking chair, one of the table with the unusual mechanical equipment on it, and one of the darker corners of the cabin, hoping vaguely that he would get some results. The man in the rocking chair tilted slowly backward, slowly forward, finally saying to Ezra, "You'll never get anything from there. You'd better get over to the other end of the shack and make your pictures."

As if hypnotized, Noyes walked toward the rear of the cabin. He stated later that as he passed a certain point, it was as if he had penetrated a curtain of total darkness. He was unable to see even as little as he had previously. He tried to turn and look back at the others, but could not move. He tried to call out but could not speak. He was completely conscious but seemed to

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have been plunged into a state of total paralysis (except, of course, for the autonomic functions that preserve the life of the body) and of sensory deprivation.

What transpired behind him, in the front end of the cabin, he could not tell. When he recovered from his paralysis and loss of sensory inputs, it was to find himself alone at the rear of the shack. It was daylight outside and sunshine was pushing through the grimy windows and open door of the shanty. He turned around and found himself facing two figures. A third was at his side.

"Ezra!" The third figure said.

"Mr. Whiteside!" Noyes responded.

"Well, I'm glad to see that you two are all right," a voice came to them from the other end of the cabin. It was the old New England twang that Ezra had heard from the man in the rocking chair, and the speaker was, indeed, Marc Feinman. He stood, wooden-faced, his back to the doorway. Elizabeth Akeley, her features similarly expressionless, stood at his side. Feinman's sporting cap was pulled down almost to the line of his eyebrows. Akeley's bangs dangled over her forehead.

Noyes claimed later that he thought he could see signs of a fresh red scar running across Akeley's forehead beneath the bangs. He claimed also that a corner of red was visible at the edge of the visor of Feinman's cap. But of course this is unverified.

"We're going now," Feinman said in his strange New England twang. "We'll take my car. You two go home in the other."

"But — but, Radiant Mother," Whiteside began.

"Elizabeth is very tired," Feinman said nasally. "You'll have to excuse her. I'm taking her away for a while."

He started out the door, guiding Elizabeth by the elbow. She walked strangely, not so much as if she were tired, ill, or even injured. Somehow, she had the tentative, uncertain movements that are associated with an amputee first learning to maneuver prosthetic devices.

They left the cabin, walked to the Ferrari. Feinman opened the door on the passenger side and guided Akeley into the car. Then he circled the vehicle, climbed in and seated himself at the wheel. Strangely, he sat for a long time staring at the controls of the sports car, almost as if he were unfamiliar with its type.

Vernon Whiteside and Ezra Noyes followed the others from the cabin. Both were still confused from their strange experience of paralysis and sensory deprivation; both stated later that they felt only half-awake, half-hypnotized. "Else," agent Whiteside later deposed, "I'd have stopped 'em for sure. Warrant or no warrant, I had probable cause that something fishy was going on, and I'd've grabbed the keys out of that Ferrari, done anything

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it took to keep those two there. But I could hardly move, I could hardly even think.

"I *did* manage to reach into that car and grab out my machine. My microcassette recorder. Then I looked at my little bug-mike and saw that it was squashed, like somebody'd just squeezed it between his thumb and his finger, only he must have been made out of iron 'cause those bug-mikes are ruggedized. They can take a wallop with a sledge hammer and not even know it. So who squashed my little bug?

"Then Feinman finally got his car started and they pulled away. I looked at the Noyes kid and he looked at me, and we headed for his Nash wagon and we went back to his house. Nearly cracked up half a dozen times on the way home, he drove like a drunk. When we got to his place we both passed out for twelve hours while Feinman and Akeley were going God-knows-where in that Ferrari.

"Soon as I got myself back together I phoned in to agency field HQ and came on in."

When agent Whiteside reported to agency field HQ he turned over the microcassette which he and Feinman had made at the shack. Excerpts from the tape follow:

(Whiteside's Channel)

(All voices mixed): Yeah, this is the place all right ... I'll — got it open, okay ... Sheesh, it's dark in here. How'd she see anything? Well ... (Buzzing sound.) What's that? What's that? Here, I'll shine my — what the hell? It looks like ... Shining cylinder. No, two of 'em. Two of 'em. What the hell, some kind of futuristic espresso machines. What the hell....

(Buzzing sound becomes very loud, dominates tape. Then it drops and a rustling is heard.)

Voice #3 (Vernon Whiteside): Here, lend me that thing a minute. No, I just gotta see what's over there. Okay, you stay here a minute, I gotta see what's....

(Sound of walking, buzzing continues in background but fades, rustling sound increases.)

Voice #3: Jesus God! That can't be! No, no, that can't be! It's too....

(Sound of thump, as if microphone were being struck and then crushed between superhard metallic surfaces. Remainder of Whiteside channel is silent.)

(Feinman Channel)

(Early portion identical to Whiteside channel; excerpts begin following end of recording on Whiteside channel.)

Voice #1 (Marc Feinman): Vernon? Vernon? What —

Voice #6 (Henry Wentworth Akeley?): He is unharmed.

Voice #1: Who's that?

Voice #6: I am Henry Wentworth Akeley.

Voice #1: Lizzy's great-grandfather.

Voice #6: Precisely. And you are Mr. Feinman?

Voice #1: Where are you, Akeley?

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Voice #6: I am here.

Voice #1: Where? I don't see ... what happened to Whiteside? Listen, what's going on here? I don't like what's going on here.

Voice #6: Please, Mr. Feinman, try to remain calm.

Voice #1: Where are you, Akeley? For the last time....

Voice #6: Please, Mr. Feinman, I must ask you to calm yourself. (Rustling sound.) Ah, that's better. Now, Mr. Feinman, do you not see certain objects on the table? Good. Now, Mr. Feinman, you are an intelligent and courageous young man. I understand that your interests are wide and your thirst for knowledge great. I offer you a grand opportunity. One which was offered to me half a century ago. I tried to decline at that time. My hand was forced. I never regretted having ... let us say, gone where I have gone. But I must now return to earthly flesh, and as my own integument is long destroyed, I have need of another.

Voice #1: What — where — what are you talking about? If this is some kind of....

(Loud sound of rustling, sound of thumping and struggle, incoherent gasps and gurgles, loud breathing, moans.)

(At this point the same sound that ended the Whiteside segment of the tape is heard. Remainder of Feinman channel is blank.)

When agent Whiteside and young Ezra Noyes woke from their exhausted sleep, Whiteside revealed himself as a representative of the agency. He obtained the film from young Noyes' camera. It was promptly developed at the nearest agency facility. The film was subsequently returned to Noyes, and the four usable photographs, in fuzzily screened and mimeographed form, appeared in the *Vermont UFO Intelligencer*.

A description of the four photographs follows:

Frame 1: (Shot through window of the wooden shack) A dingy room containing a rocking chair and a large wooden table.

Frame 2: (Shot inside room) A rocking chair. In the chair is sitting a man identified as Marc Feinman. Feinman's sporting cap is pulled down covering his forehead. His eyes are barely visible and seem to have a glazed appearance, but this may be due to the unusual lighting conditions. A mark on his forehead seems to be visible at the edge of the cap, but is insufficiently distinct for verification.

Frame 3: (Shot inside room) Large wooden table holding unusual mechanical apparatus. There are numerous electrical devices, power units, what appears to be a cooling unit, photoelectric cells, items which appear to be microphones, and two medium-sized metallic cylinders estimated to contain sufficient space for a human brain, along with life-support paraphernalia.

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Frame 4: (Shot inside room) This was obviously Noyes' final frame, taken as he headed toward the darkened rear area of the cabin. The rough wooden flooring before the camera is clearly visible. From it there seems to rise a curtain or wall of sheer blackness. This is not a black *substance* of any sort, but a curtain or mass of sheer negation. All attempts at analysis by agency photoanalysts have failed completely.

Elizabeth Akeley and Marc Feinman were located at — of all places — Niagara Falls, New York. They had booked a honeymoon cottage and were actually located by agents of the agency returning in traditional yellow slickers from a romantic cruise on the craft *Maid of the Mist*.

Asked to submit voluntarily to agency interrogation, Feinman refused. Akeley, at Feinman's prompting, simply shook her head negatively. "But I'll tell you what," Feinman said in a marked New England twang, "I'll make out a written statement for you if you'll settle for that."

Representatives of the agency considered this particularly unsatisfactory, but having no grounds for holding Feinman or Akeley and being particularly sensitive to criticism of the agency for alleged intrusion upon the religious freedoms of unorthodox cults, the representatives of the agency were constrained to accept Feinman's offer.

The deposition provided by Feinman — and co-sworn by Akeley — represented a vague and rambling narrative of no value. Its concluding paragraph follows:

All we want is to be left alone. We love each other. We're here now and we're happy here. What came before is over. That's somebody else's concern now. Let them go. Let them see. Let them learn. Vega, Aldebaran, Ophiuchi, the Crab Nebula. Let them see. Let them learn. Someday we may wish to go back. We will have a way to summon those ones. When we summon those ones they will respond.

A final effort by representatives of the agency was made, in an additional visit to the abandoned shack by the sycamore copse off the Passumpsic-Ludlow road. A squad of agents wearing regulation black outfits were guided by Vernon Whiteside. An additional agent remained at the Noyes home to assure noninterference by Ezra Noyes.

Whiteside guided his fellow agents to the sycamore copse. Several agents remarked at the warmth and debilitating feeling they experienced as they passed through the copse. In addition, an abnormal number of small cadavers — squirrels, chipmunks, one grey fox, a skunk, and several whippoorwils — were noted, lying beneath the trees.

The shack contained an aged wooden rocking chair, a battered overstuffed couch, and a large wooden table. Whatever might have previously

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stood upon the table had been removed.

There was no evidence of the so-called wall or curtain of darkness. The rear of the shack was vacant.

In the months since the incidents above reported, two additional developments have taken place, note of which is appropriate herein.

First, Marc Feinman and Elizabeth Akeley returned to San Diego in Feinman's Ferrari Boxer. There, they took up residence at the Pleasant Street location. Feinman vacated the Upas Street apartment; he returned to his work with the computer firm. Inquiries placed with his employers indicate that he appeared, upon returning, to be absent-minded and disoriented, and unexpectedly to require briefings in computer technology and programming concepts with which he had previously been thoroughly familiar.

Feinman explained this curious lapse by stating that he had experienced a head injury while vacationing in Vermont and still suffered from occasional lapses of memory. He showed a vivid but rapidly fading scar on his forehead as evidence of the injury. His work performance quickly returned to its usual high standard. "Marc's as smart as the brightest prof you ever studied under," his supervisor stated to the agency. "But that Vermont trip made some impression on him! He picked up this funny New England twang in his speech, and it just won't go away."

Elizabeth Akeley went into seclusion. Feinman announced that they had been married and that Elizabeth was, at least temporarily, abandoning her position as Radiant Mother of the Spiritual Light Church, although remaining a faithful member of the Church. In Feinman's company she regularly attends Sunday worship services, but seldom speaks.

The second item of note is of questionable relevance and significance but is included here as a matter of completing the appropriate documentation. Vermont Forestry Service officers have reported that a new variety of sycamore tree has appeared in the Windham County - Windsor County section of the state. The new sycamores are lush and extremely hardy. They seem to generate a peculiarly *warm* atmosphere and are not congenial to small forest animals. Forestry officers who have investigated report a strange sense of lassitude when standing beneath these trees, and one officer has apparently been lost while exploring a stand of the trees near the town of Passumpsic.

Forestry Service agents are maintaining a constant watch on the spread of the new variety of sycamores.

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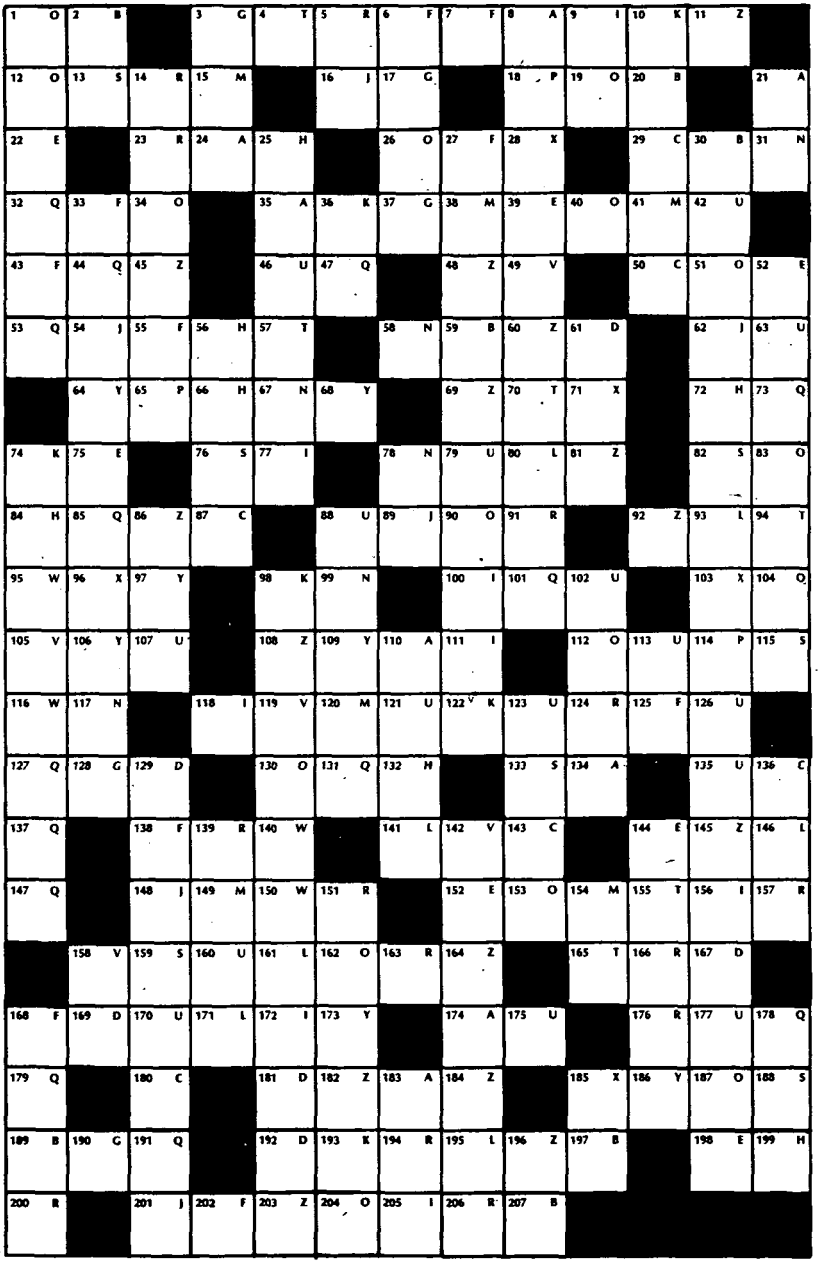

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Acrostic Puzzle

by Rachel Cosgrove Payes

This puzzle contains a quotation from a science fiction story. First, guess the clues and write the word in the numbered blanks beside the clues. Put these letters in the matching blocks in the puzzle. (The end of the line is not necessarily the end of a word. Words end with black squares.) If your clue words are correct, you will see words forming in the puzzle blocks. If you can guess some of these words, put the letters into the blanks for the clues, over the appropriate numbers. This will help to guess more words. The first letters of the correctly worked clues spell the name of the author and the title of the sf work from which the quotation is taken.

A. _____ DREAMS: Haldeman.
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
21 183 134 8 110 24 174 35

B. How well dressed ghost is garbed.
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
207 59 2 189 20 30 197

C. Wrote THE COLD CASH WAR.
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
180 87 29 143 136 50

D. Judith L. Blish's address.
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
169 129 181 192 61 167

E. Leiber's wife.
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
39 198 22 144 52 152 75

F. Where most nuts are found in cars (3 words).
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
27 55 7 168 125 138 43 202 6 33

G. To sharpen Conan's sword.
___ ___ ___ ___ ___
3 17 190 128 37

H. Neck of land between two larger areas.
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
56 66 132 84 72 199 25

I. Topic of Simak novel.
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
9 205 118 100 77 111 156 172

J. Greenish altered dibase.
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
54 201 62 16 148 89

K. British sf magazine.
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
193 98 74 122 10 36

L. Pertaining to sf fandom.
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
141 80 195 93 171 146 161

M. Every good sf story needs one (two words).
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
154 15 149 38 120 41

N. Involved in matter of gravity.
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
99 117 58 78 31 67

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O. Fantasy heroine's prison (five words).

104	1	34	187	130	112	19	12	40	204

51	83	162	26	153	90

P. Past.

65	18	114

Q. Sheffield novel (three words).

191	44	127	101	147	47	178	32	53	73

179	85	131	137

R. By Ben Bova (three words).

151	23	91	124	163	176	200	166	206	14

194	5	139	157

S. Having same atomic number but different atomic wt.

159	76	82	188	133	115	13

T. Particular.

57	165	70	4	155	94

U. What lunar-orbit astronauts wanted to do (four words).

170	177	63	88	160	135	113	175	46	79

121	107	126	123	42	102

V. ____ ____ is me! (two words).

119	105	158	142	49

W. Small southern boat.

140	150	95	116

X. An atom (archaic).

96	71	103	185	28

Y. Pohl's access to awards.

173	186	68	106	64	109	97

Z. Poul Anderson/Gordon Dickson novel (two words).

196	92	203	164	108	45	182	69	11	48

145	86	184	60	81

Answer will appear in the April issue.

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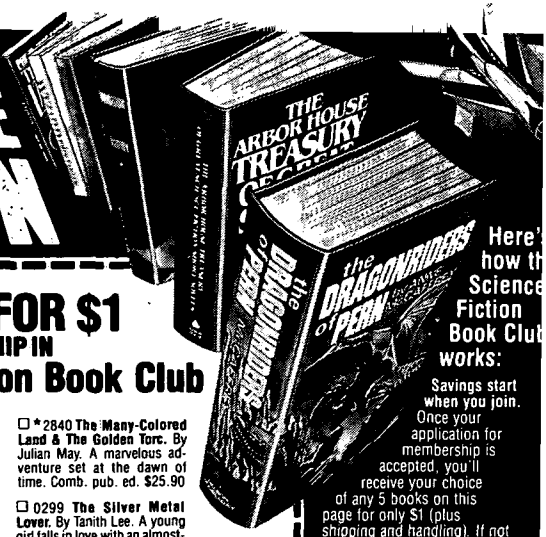

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